

# **Early Education Foundation: Portuguese Canadian Mothers' Preferences and Choices**

*Laudalina Rodrigues, Honours B.A.*

**Department of Graduate and Undergraduate  
Studies in Education  
Faculty of Education, Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices regarding their children's early care and education. The findings revealed that Portuguese-Canadian mothers value early care and education and are conscious of their role in their children's lives. Regardless of the type of care setting, the participants' responses revealed that the caregiver's care, emotion, and responsiveness are most important. More than developing "savvy" children, we need to nourish "happy" children.

The study's participants include 9 Portuguese Canadian mothers without any assumption of a hyphenated identity and who have moved away from their immigrant parents' script. They embraced the vision of their children's success and cultivated their vast potential. Their responses revealed that the family, culture, and traditions are important factors in their child's academic and social growth and played a critical role in establishing the foundations for learning.

The research study findings showed that the field of early care and education is undergoing a paradigm shift and that other practices, ideologies, and theories are surfacing. This study aimed to help develop a new grounded theory that contributes to a better understanding of this arena. The present findings reveal important issues for further discussion and lay a theoretical and empirical framework for future research in early education and care.

## **Acknowledgments**

“Be still when you have nothing to say; when genuine passion moves you, say what you have got to say and say it hot” (David Herbert Lawrence, Eastwood, England, 1885-1930).

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## **Dedication**

This journey is dedicated to my husband, Jose, for his love. Jose was there through all the ups and downs, successes and failures, and accolades and criticisms. He put his life on hold to live part of mine.

This passage of my life is dedicated to my sons, Rafael Alexandre and Edmundo Felipe, for being the eternal fountain of inspiration in my life.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

The Portuguese immigration to Canada started in the mid-1950s and lasted to the early 1990s. Most of the Portuguese immigrants originated from mainland Portugal and from the islands of the Azores. They mainly came from rural areas, had limited education and were considered relatively unskilled (Giles, 2002; Nunes, 1998; 2004; Oliveira & Teixeira, 2004; Teixeira & Lavigne, 1992).

The great majority of Portuguese women entered Canada before 1974. Those first generation women had also little schooling, lack of special skills, were legal and economic dependents of their husbands and tended to work for low wages, mainly in manufacturing and paid domestic work (Giles, 2002; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1986).

Today, there are approximately 411,000 Portuguese in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008 Census) and the great majority (69%) reside in Ontario in urban centers (Ornstein, 2006a). For the purpose of this study, Portuguese-Canadians are defined as Portugal-born or Canadian-born children of Portuguese descent who identify themselves as such. The literature indicates that, as a community, Portuguese-Canadians are in a position of educational disadvantage in the Canadian social landscape. The academic underachievement of Portuguese-Canadian youth is one of the major issues that affect the community (Delhi & Januário, 1994; Fonseca, 2010; McLaren, 1986; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1998, 2008; Ornstein, 2006a; Teixeira & Lavigne, 1992).

The Portuguese parents trusted the educational system, as they felt that they did not have the skills and practice to support their children in academic matters. “Unlike most middle class Canadian parents regarding school involvement, they suffer...lack of self-worth, social respect and dignity” (Noivo, 1997, p.88). Noivo suggests that

Portuguese parents understand their children's failure regarding education as an individual insufficiency and not as a structural problem. They value education as a means to an end and do not get involved in their children's academic life. As Santos (2006) points out, Portuguese parents' relaxed attitude towards their children's schooling is often "perceived as disinterest," because they are working multiple jobs or too many hours (cited in Morgado, 2009, p. 51). In addition, Morgado further argued that Portuguese parents have a lack of understanding and trust in the education system.

The trajectory of the second generation women was different from their mothers'. The second generations wish their children to get a higher education and good jobs. As Giles (2002) highlights, the Portuguese second generation women are fluent in English, work in business, retail trade, financial, health, and social service industries, as well as manufacturing and other services. These women are much better educated and experience upward mobility with higher jobs and better pay. The majority of these women value education even though they may not have been able to access it to their complete satisfaction (Giles, 2002; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 2004).

### **Background to the Problem**

Over the last 2 decades the secondary school dropout rate has been consistent among Portuguese-Canadian students. Many have struggled through the education system, with some of them never catching up to the other children and falling behind. The Report of the Royal Commission on Learning highlighted persistent differences in educational achievement in Ontario secondary schools. The report noted that "more remains to be done.... We have learned that Black students, as well as Portuguese and Hispanic students are having disproportionate difficulties" (Royal Commission on

Learning, 1994, p. 1). Likewise, Ornstein (2006a) indicates that the proportion of persons aged 25 to 34 at the time of the 2001 census who have not completed secondary school was more than 30% for the Portuguese. He also found that 81% of all the southern European groups had completed secondary school except for 67% of the Portuguese. In the same vein, Brown (2006) stated that the groups of grade 9 students with the highest at-risk status in both 2003-4 and 2004-5 were those whose first language was Spanish, Portuguese, or Somali. By the fall of 2005, according to Toronto District Board Data Report on Ontario's Urban and Suburban schools, the language group with the highest dropout rate was the Portuguese speaking students with 43% (Statistics Canada, n.d.). Bearing in mind the above statistics, it is disturbing that the dropout rate among Portuguese-Canadians remains unacceptably high. In this study dropout is defined as the process through which any student leaves school before having obtained their secondary school graduation diploma (Radwanski, 1987).

Although in recent years many efforts have been directed at sensitizing educators to systemic factors which inhibit student success (for instance, Toronto District School Board, 2006) calls on schools to tackle the achievement gap faced by racial/ethnic minorities such as Black, Aboriginal, Hispanic, Portuguese and Middle Eastern groups), the dropout issue has been recurrent among the Portuguese student population (e.g., Alpalhão & Da Rosa, 1980; Brown, 2006; Giles, 2002; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 2004, 2008; Ornstein, 2006a; Santos, 2006; Teixeira & Lavigne, 1992). An article published in the Toronto Star newspaper (June, 20, 2008) discusses the new urban diversity plan the aim of which is to make all intermediate and secondary schools across Toronto more sensitive to the demographic roadblocks students of different backgrounds face (Connelli, 2008).

Angela Wilson, one of the group members that lobbied for the Africentric alternative school in Toronto, argued that “this is like throwing a bone to a dog; they’re putting the meat of the issue under the umbrella of diversity and not having specific strategies for each group with a high dropout rate, like black and Portuguese and others” (p. 13).

A large body of research has pinpointed different constructs which inhibit students’ achievement. Other studies challenge the different educational practices that account for school access and success. According to Griffith (1997), children’s success in school tends to vary according to their race or ethnicity and social class. Livingstone, Curtis, and Smaller (1992) argue schools have segregated children on the basis of social class. They further pointed out that working-class students have always fared much worse in school than middle- and upper-class students. In the same vein, other theorists have raised different questions to explain minority groups’ school underachievement. Cummins (1986) discusses the minority groups’ educational unattainment in relation to both home and school cultures. Ogbu (1978) ascribes caste statuses of minorities failure to economic and social discrimination combined with the internalization of the feeling of inferiority, whereas Feuerstein and Tannenbaum (1979), for example, attribute academic failure to the alienation of a group from its own culture. Therefore, despite that most minority group parents have high expectations for their children and want to be involved in promoting their academic success (Wong Fillmore, 1991), they do not know how to help their children academically (Cummins, 1986; Fonseca 2010).

It is crucial to understand the social and structural barriers and the school factors that affect Portuguese children’s academic performance in Canada. In “Marginalization, Social Reproduction and Academic Underachievement: The Case of the Portuguese

Community in Canada,” Nunes (2004) reiterates that the factors pertaining to the issue of Portuguese underachievement are the result of the constant economic, political and cultural marginalization of the community (e.g., access to ESL, streaming in the Canadian school system, and cultural curricular inclusiveness). Aligned with Nunes’s perspective, Januário (2003), discussing the formation of the TPPA (Toronto Portuguese Parents Association), referred to parents’ concerns regarding the recurrent streaming, the low expectations, and academic results in “inner-city schools” in Toronto. Furthermore, the Portuguese tend to be complacent about low level of employment due to their lower expectations about themselves (Teixeira & Lavigne, 1992).

Joel (1995) wrote that “honour, pride and dignity are sometimes the only possessions that immigrants can possess in a strange environment and the deprivation of these basic rights provokes bitter remarks and the sense of strangeness” (p. 226). The denial of their sense of humanity and the feeling of inferiority is a thought that minority groups resent and that are deeply buried inside them for a long time. Aligned with Joel’s remarks on the immigrants’ selflessness, Nunes (1998) argued that subjectivity is an essential element to understanding how minority Portuguese children perceive their social and personal realities in relation to mainstream. Accordingly, Freire (1970) challenged learners to read the world through the word and that “human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (p. 75); therefore, power and status relations exert a major influence on students’ school performance (Cummins, 1986; Ogbu, 1978). For example, McLaren (1986) in his study *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* on 8th grade Portuguese students in a Canadian Catholic school in Toronto,

illustrates how rituals for learning reinforce oppression in school practices, with the subsequent subordination of minority students' status.

The variability of minority students' academic performance points out that many complex and interrelated factors are at work (Wong Fillmore, 1991; Ogbu, 1978). Mackay and Myles (1995) highlight the variables such as family background, personal characteristics and attitudes, academic achievement, and school climate as significant in their explanation of why First Nations students dropped out. Likewise, another study by Lawton and Stewart (1988) investigates how the school system and other social variables place some students in a marginal position, eventually leading them to drop out. Furthermore, when addressing similarities through scores on attitude or ability tests, we are suppressing the individual differences and dislocating the students from their culture and communities so we cannot map on to models of development which are treated as univocal paradigms. Giles (2002) argues that the ideology of multiculturalism has shaped immigration policy with groups such as "Chinese, Italians and Portuguese" (p. 121) experiencing inequalities and cultural and social marginalization.

The issue of the disproportionate academic underachievement of Portuguese-Canadian youth with the dropout rate of 42% is "worrying and unusual" (Ornstein, 2006a). Despite the fact that many Portuguese immigrants have attained a certain economic stability (Nunes, 2008; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2009), they display significantly lower levels of formal education than the population at large (e.g., Fonseca, 2010; Gomes, 2008; Morgado, 2009; Ornstein, 2006a).

Given the continuously high dropout rate for the Portuguese-speaking students, this study will concentrate on trying to understand what might be the starting point

leading to the trajectory of the staggering dropout rates. The intent of this study is to explore Portuguese-Canadian mothers' perceptions about early learning and care choices.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Every child has the right to an equal opportunity to learn and succeed as a result of an excellent education. This has not necessarily been the case for Portuguese-Canadian students as exemplified by the dropout rates of the last 2 decades in Toronto (Fonseca, 2010; Morgado, 2009). One of the major issues that affect the Portuguese community is their academic underachievement. The current state of affairs is that the Portuguese students—as a group—have continued to function well below the average in Toronto schools, with one of the highest dropout rate—42% (Ornstein, 2006a).

“The 1997 Every Secondary Student Survey: Preliminary Findings” showed Portuguese and Black students grade 9 (14-year-olds) to be at the bottom of the academic heap (Cheng & Yau, 1998). Ornstein (2000) identifies the Portuguese community in Toronto as one suffering “extreme disadvantage” with a 30% secondary school dropout rate. From 2003 to 2005, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) named the Portuguese one of the language groups with the highest dropout rate—43%. It is also one group with the highest proportion of at-risk grade 9 students (Brown, 2006). This clearly demonstrated the educational gap between the Portuguese-Canadian students and their student cohort.

In a democratic society public schooling is obligated to respond constructively to all children. If the Portuguese-Canadian students are underachieving after three generations in Canada, the issue obviously deserves attention. As Noivo (1997) argued



“the overall educational, social, and economic lives of the third generation are alarming” (p. 134).

Somewhere along the line the Portuguese-Canadian students fall through the cracks. The burning question is “when” and “how” does it happen? It is in the early years (between birth and 6 years) where most striking changes in behaviour are linked to the child’s growing sense of his/her identity and that one’s development can be guided towards the highest potential (Elkind, 1995). Early education may well be the foundation to understand and tackle the underachievement of the Portuguese-Canadian students in Metropolitan Toronto. Early experiences shape the development of children’s cognitive, social, and emotional capacities and have profound influence on later life (Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2002; Seefeldt, 1990). Therefore, a stimulated early education can be a prime target of intervention to overcome the educational deficit that assails the Portuguese-Canadian community. After all, most would agree it is more efficient and cost effective to prevent “problems” than to solve them afterward.

Therefore, investing in early education might be the key response to tackle the dropout challenge. The Nobel Laureate J. Heckman (2004) stated that early success breeds later success, and early failure breeds later failure. Hence early education is the time frame when parents, caregivers, and communities can optimally invest in children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development, as early education has been found to be a powerful tool for empowering minority children (Cummins, 1986). Despite the dropout rate among the Portuguese-Canadian children remaining very high, few of the recommendations for school reform specifically address the causes of educational failure (Cummins; Nunes, 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Ruddick (2007) points out that a “mother’s thought” includes the “intellectual capacities she develops, the judgments she makes, the metaphysical attitudes she assumes, the values she affirms” (p. 96). Ruddick further suggests that mothers, generally the primary caregivers, shape the way their children view the world. Consequently it is crucial to attend to ways in which mothers enable their children to effectively negotiate the system to enhance their confidence, their self-esteem, and the written and unwritten standards of social intervention.

I propose, therefore, to explore what are the attitudes, values, role of emotions, and the preferences of Portuguese-Canadian mothers regarding their children’s early education. More specifically, I would like to know what sociocultural and psychological conditions lead the Portuguese-Canadian mothers to make their decisions. Therefore, I argue that Portuguese-Canadian mothers’ choices regarding their children’s early education impact their children’s trajectory toward academic achievement.

### **Empirical Questions**

Two research questions guided this study:

1. What decisions do the Portuguese-Canadian mothers make regarding their children’s early care and education?
2. Why do Portuguese-Canadian mothers make these choices? In other words, what are the sociological and psychological conditions influencing the mothers regarding early care arrangements?

### **Rationale: Theory of Mind (ToM)**

Borrowing from Ruddick (2007), the “Conception of Achievement” (p. 97), the end to which maternal efforts are directed, explains the capacities, judgments, metaphysical attitudes, and values of maternal thought and provides a framework to interpret Portuguese-Canadian mothers’ actions by considering their thoughts and needs. Mothers act to fulfill their desires in light of their beliefs. Their maternal mind-mindedness helps their children learn about feelings, beliefs and the perspectives of other people. “Theory of Mind” (ToM) is defined as the ability to read minds and hearts of others, allowing a person to explain behaviour using “mental states such as beliefs, intention, knowledge and desires” (Patnaik, 2008, p. 329). Therefore, mothers’ mental and emotional landscape gives meaning to their actions and the events their children experience which contribute to how their children learn. Mothers can choose different kinds of care according to their beliefs and aspirations in an attempt to adjust their perspectives to competing demands of family.

Research shows that Theory of Mind development has consequences for children’s social functioning and school success. It is the child’s ToM, their understanding of people’s mental world (beliefs, emotions, and desires) and of social roles and rules that result in meaningful participation in their social and cultural environment and their growth in later life (Astington & Jenkins, 1995; Patnaik, 2008). It is children’s emergent understanding of the social world that allows them to ascribe intentionality to other people’s thoughts. Hence, they respond by reproducing what they perceive, for instance, to be their mothers’ values and beliefs by transforming those values into their own ideas. According to Astington and Edward (2010), the ToM that

children acquire in early years provides them with the conceptual foundation for their metacognitive skills learned in school. When children finish kindergarten, their ToM is intuitively embedded in everyday social interaction.

Astington (1998) argues that the most important role for mothers and teachers in early education is to lead children to reflect on and articulate their thinking. Therefore, Astington suggests that the social understanding of preschoolers as “thinking beings” is the best baggage they can carry into their school life. She further puts forward that early education is seen as the foundation of lifelong learning and is the necessary condition for ensuring a start in life for all children.

### **Importance of the Study**

There is increasing evidence to support the importance of investing in early care and education and its impact on children’s development. Elkind (1986) asserts that including “academics too soon may cause children to think that school is boring” (p.31) and that playing is the best mode for children to learn. Furthermore, children need to feel that learning is fun and exciting. Thus, emotions are significant in their social behaviour, and through them children color and interpret their world (Hunt, 2007). If they are enthusiastic and do not feel stressed, learning will take place. Hence emotions can shape their process of socialization, inhibiting or facilitating learning. Zajonc (1980) views emotion as the response to the world, with subsequent cognitive consequences. In addition, it is important for understanding children’s process of socialization through which their emotions are connected to the social world.

As such, “ the importance of children gaining relationship-oriented competencies at a very early age is highlighted by studies suggesting that such long-term problems as

school dropout accompany unsuccessful childhood social relationships” (Ladd, Bush & Troop, 2002, p. 1114). Therefore, early education is the foundation to creating the stimulation and empowerment that children need for later school success. Elkind (1986) argues that there is a long-term effect of early education on the child’s perceptions of self as a learner.

Some students experience academic failure (e.g., Cummins, 1986; Ogbu, 1978). As a result, there is a widespread publication claiming that students from a number of racial and ethnic groups in the Toronto education system are not receiving an equal opportunity to a good education (Gomes, 2008; Oliveira & Teixeira, 2004; Trindade, 2007). For example, the Portuguese-Canadian students in Toronto are considered to be one of those highly at-risk ethno-cultural groups (Ornstein, 2006b).

Little research has been conducted on the topic of Portuguese-Canadian students, their parents, and the reason for their cognitive, social, and emotional difficulties and the formation of their cultural identity (Giles, 2002; Gomes, 2008; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1998, 2004, 2008; Santos, 2006; Trindade, 2007). Additionally very little research on second generation Portuguese-Canadian exists, namely on Portuguese youth (Fonseca, 2010; Gomes, 2008; Morgado, 2009; Oliveira & Teixeira, 2004; Trindade, 2007). Furthermore, some information that was available was nonscientific, scattered throughout newspaper anecdotal accounts, and it has a tendency to place Portuguese parents’ cultural traits and practices at the centre of the question regarding educational achievement (Nunes, 1998). In his study “Striking a Balance in Canada’s Diversity Dialogue: The case of the Portuguese-Canadian Community,” Nunes (2008) states that “nowhere is the gap in research and policy more evident than in the case of the Portuguese in Canada” (p.

121) and calls for the need for ethno-specific research and diversity dialogue addressing the Portuguese reality. Due to the lack of studies available on the specific issue of early education for Portuguese-Canadian children, it is important to investigate the Portuguese-Canadian mothers' orientations and decisions towards their children's early education.

This study of the Portuguese-Canadian mothers' perceptions and choices will also contribute to our awareness of the underlying reasons behind mothers' decisions for children's care arrangements. In this study, Portuguese-Canadian mothers are defined as mothers of Portuguese descent, born in either Portugal or Canada, in heterosexual relationships and who have 2- to 3-year-old children in child care. Second, the study will help create a portrait of Portuguese-Canadian preschool-age children in Toronto. This portrait may be used to predict future trends for the purpose of early intervention. Finally, the research illuminates the importance of early education as a starting point to address the underachievement and dropout problem of ethno-cultural and racial minority children.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand Portuguese-Canadian mothers' perceptions regarding their children's early education I will draw on Maternal Thinking Theory (Ruddick, 2007). I also present four theoretical frameworks: Cultural-Cognitive Psychological Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Cognitive Constructivist Theory (Piaget, 1975), Attachment Theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) and Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2004). These theories were selected because they build the case that Portuguese-Canadian mothers' decisions about early education are very important for school achievement and will be further explained in Chapter Two.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

Early learning is a relatively unexplored area in the Portuguese-Canadian community in Toronto, and very little information is available about how mothers choose the setting for their young children. However, I would argue that Portuguese-Canadian mothers' choices regarding their children's early education impact their children's trajectory toward academic achievement.

This study uses a grounded theory design of the qualitative research methodology. As a process theory grounded in the data, it does not have a wide applicability or scope, it is not a grand theory that is applied to many people's situations; it is a middle range theory (Charmaz, 2000) drawn from some individuals or data sources to provide an explanation. I highlight the advantage of the individual interview as a flexible method which generates descriptive data to provide in-depth information on the values, facts, and behaviours of the interviewees. There are some limitations related to this research method, such as the fact that an individual interview as a research tool takes into account personal factors, making it difficult to draw general conclusions.

It is hoped that the conclusions drawn will be useful for the Portuguese-Canadian community and will lay the groundwork for future studies on ethno-cultural minority children. This study explores Portuguese-Canadian mothers in Metropolitan Toronto and how they make choices regarding their children's early care and education. It is anticipated that this research will contribute to the (re)conceptualization of the complex social phenomenon of early school dropouts for the Portuguese-Canadian population.

### **Outline of Remainder of Document**

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature relating to the importance of the early years in children's education. Specifically, I focused on Portuguese-Canadian mothers' rationale in the early educational and care choices for their children. The second part of the chapter includes information about Maternal Thinking Theory to explain Portuguese-Canadian mothers' perceptions about their children's early education. It will also provide an overview of four other sociological and psychological theories that account for the importance of early education on children's development and school completion. Chapter Three identifies the research methodology carried out in this study. It encompasses the description of qualitative approach, the rationale for the grounded theory research design used to collect and analyze data, the research limitation, and establishing credibility. In Chapter Four, grounded theory generated by this study is described and the findings of the personal interviews are presented and analyzed. Chapter Five provides a summary and discussion of key areas of the study and implications for theory, practice, and further research in this area. The chapter concludes with my personal reflection on the issue of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices about their children's best care and education.

All figures in the upcoming chapters are designed by me to depict my understanding of various theories and to present my field research through the grounded theory design.



## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this literature review is to convey the knowledge gathered regarding the Portuguese community and to address the importance of early education in children's social and emotional success. This chapter will examine the psychological and sociological theories that pertain to: Maternal Thinking, Attachment Theory, Cognitive Constructivism Theory, Cultural Cognitive Psychological Theory and Bio-Ecological Theory to build the case about the importance of investigating Portuguese-Canadian mothers' rationale for their choices regarding their children's early education. This chapter provides a comprehensive revision of the literature pertaining to the general impact of early education.

### **The Portuguese Community**

The Portuguese community is a largely working-class community (Giles, 2002; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1998, 2004) and is concentrated mainly in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver metropolitan areas. There are 189,405 Portuguese-Canadians in the Toronto metropolitan area (Statistics Canada, 2006). It is estimated that more than 60% of Portuguese in Canada were born in the Azores, in particular the island of Sao Miguel, or are descendants of Azorean families, while the rest came from continental Portugal (Giles, 2002; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2000, 2009). The Portuguese community has expanded since the 1970s, and it has been in transition of suburbanization (Mississauga and Brampton), moving beyond its original Little Portugal (Teixeira, 2000; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2000; Trindade, 2007). Although the Portuguese-Canadians do not live in poverty, their occupational segregation reflects the community's lack of a better educated

segment that would be able to dialogue more effectively with the Canadian mainstream (e.g., Nunes, 2008).

In fact, many of the Portuguese who immigrated to Canada originated from the poorest, illiterate, and disempowered rural segments of Portugal. They lived under the authoritarian regime of Salazar (1932-1974) alongside the powerful influence exercised by the Roman Catholic Church. When Portuguese immigrants arrived in Canada they faced cultural and social segregation and often were unable to provide their children with the knowledge, contacts, and resources which Canadian families take for granted (Higgs, 1990; Nunes, 2003, 2004; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2009; Teixeira & Lavigne, 1992). The economic, social, and political marginalization of the Portuguese community has been the deterrent factor for their full integration into Canadian society (Nunes, 2004). Oliveira and Teixeira (2004) indicate that the Portuguese community in Toronto has remained for the most part self-sufficient and self-contained (i.e., the community has developed around numerous institutions established by Portuguese immigrants). This has resulted in the spatial and social isolation of the Portuguese community from Canadian society.

Some Portuguese-Canadian children have been inculcated with the segregated roles and disenfranchised identity adopted by their parents. It is the intergenerational reproduction of parental roles and habits transmitted to their children that enable the perpetuation of the feeling of cultural duality and difficulties in their sense of belonging to Canadian society (Cummins, Lopes, & Ramos, 1987; Gomes, 2008; Noivo, 1997, 2000; Nunes, 1998, 2004, 2008; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2009).

Second generation individuals who are generally born in Canada and attended school in Canada have not faced the same English language fluency problems and have

completed more years of education (Giles, 2002; Nunes, 1999; Trindade, 2007).

However, Oliveira and Teixeira (2004) explain that the second generation Portuguese-Canadians has not achieved the most important components of successful integration: higher education and occupational statuses. Noivo (1997) and Nunes (2008) note that the Portuguese community, already entering into the third and fourth generations, continues to be segregated from many sectors of Canadian society.

### *Portuguese Institutions*

Portuguese-Canadians created various institutions in Toronto to address the issue of underachievement among Portuguese youth. What follows is a very brief overview of the responses of various institutions over the last 3 decades. In the 1980s the Toronto Portuguese Parents Association (TPPA) criticized the policy of streaming and ability grouping as being discriminatory towards Portuguese-Canadian students (Nunes, 2003). In the 1990s The Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education among other initiatives developed the “First Steps” and “Steps to University” for kindergarten and grade 11 students. The Portuguese-Canadian National Congress undertook different studies to profile the overall state of the Portuguese-Canadian (Nunes) and promoted the research of problems that afflict the community. For example, Project Diploma (2004) tackled the causes of the limited postsecondary education among Portuguese-Canadians and suggested steps that may be appropriate for the academic betterment of education among Portuguese-Canadian youth. Likewise, “On Your Mark Tutoring & Mentoring Program” offered by Working Women Community Centre continues to support secondary school students with their academic performance by pairing them with university volunteers. In 2009, they served over 300 students from both the Toronto

District School Board (TDSB) and Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). Organizations and institutions continue to make an effort to address these academic success issues.

### *Portuguese-Canadian Family*

Family is the primary arena where children perceive and learn how to construct their realities. As shown in *Inside Ethnic Families: Three Generations of Portuguese-Canadians*, Noivo (1997) describes the patriarchal structure of Portuguese families with fathers playing the traditional role of authoritative breadwinners, although those who want to break imposed cultural moulds are criticized by their own families. Anderson and Higgs (1976) referred to the Portuguese children as having to obey to their fathers. Although women are often co-providers of family incomes, they are segregated in their households, where all family life and chores revolve around them. Those who are younger and want to rebel and move away from their culturally excluded duties are paradoxically trapped between their more liberating ideas and the traditional roles imposed by their families (namely their husbands and parents).

Many second generation Portuguese-Canadians were expected to help their parents for family income pooling, so they began working at an early age. As a result, second generation children frequently married very young as a form of emancipation from parental control. Many Portuguese-Canadians rely on their parents' assistance, including babysitting and housework and financial resources. Oliveira and Teixeira (2004), Trindade (2007), and Noivo (1997) highlight that many Portuguese-Canadians have not attained higher social mobility in Canada. In Montreal, Noivo (1997) stated that the third generation Portuguese-Canadians were not forced by their parents to leave

school at an early age but academically had failed miserably, rarely enrolling in postsecondary school.

Santos (2006) also described how the Portuguese in British Columbia were the least likely of any group in that province to graduate from high school. Nunes (2004, 2008; Gomes, 2008) reiterated that the Portuguese-Canadian youth entering the same marginalized socioeconomic roles that their parents occupy are perpetuating the marginalization of Portuguese-Canadians. Fonseca (2010) discerned how Portuguese-Canadian young men's little expectations for a secondary diploma and their tendency to leave school early were regarded as an incentive to enter the work force and earn money. According to Brown's (2006, 2010) Research Report The Grade 9 Cohort of Fall 2004, of TDSB, the three language groups with the lowest graduation rates in both Fall 2000 and Fall 2004 were Portuguese-, Spanish-, and Somali-speaking students. However, the graduation rate of Portuguese students increased from 48% to 66%.

In addition, family ideology, values, and familial interdependence also shape the development of the child. Culturally, the Portuguese family values the interdependence with family and community as a developmental script in child-rearing practices and socialization. The ideological beliefs of interdependence in terms of family relationships and upbringing practices are assumed to be consistent with the stability and consistency of family solidarity. It is the culture of home, the protective "haven," which is a tenet in the "familism ideology" referred by Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995). This theory "familism" provides insights into the socially oriented societies. It is a cultural value that describes a strong attachment and loyalty to one's family and weighs on the interdependence between nuclear and extended family members for support, emotional

connectedness, and loyalty. How far is children's development related to the environment in which they live? In a familistic culture, the norms and traditions are transmitted to the younger generation, who perceive these to be legitimate. Unlike independence so valued by many Canadians (Clarke, 1989), the Portuguese culture values interdependence, fostering autonomy as a form of reciprocal sense of commitment and co-operation embedded in emotional dependency and obligation. For instance, Araújo (2008) reinforces the theory of familism, referring to the "close-knit nature" of the Portuguese family (p. 38) in which the household is a collective pool of resources for the good of all members. Hence, many Portuguese-Canadian families rely on their extended family, creating interpersonal relations and maintaining family ties. Therefore, many first generation Portuguese-Canadians function socially and emotionally through their children. Retired Portuguese grandmothers, for example, "as vavos," admitted to being completely devoted to their children's lives and practically being the ones raising their grandchildren (Giles, 2002; Noivo, 1997).

As well, Portuguese family dynamics also have changed. For instance, Portuguese-Canadian children were pressed into the role of translators/interpreters as they had to translate for their immigrant parents, what was a substantial responsibility for them (Araújo, 2008).

The issue of educational underachievement among Portuguese-Canadian students as an ethno-cultural minority group who have to cross barriers between two subcultures—their community and their family—to immerse into Canadian mainstream might be seen as a systematic problem (e.g., Fonseca, 2010; Nunes, 2008). The transition

is a demanding and vulnerable path and results in their lagging behind in their accomplishments.

### *Portuguese Women*

Most of the Portuguese immigrant women did not have any formal education and had no English language skills; therefore their choices in the job market in Toronto were limited to manual labour, mainly in the area of domestic work (Giles, 2002; Nunes, 1986). Despite their economic contribution being crucial to their households, they maintained the traditional values at home of doing all the chores. These women perpetuated the patriarchal family ideology (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995) of being confined to their home and family life. In *Portuguese Women in Toronto*, Giles (2002) portrays the Portuguese immigrant women as being excluded from their legitimate place in society and that both their own and their daughters' primary attachment should be the home. While the boys were raised not to be compelled to do domestic work, women were raised to perceive that their roles should be as family caregivers and doing what their husbands tell them to do (Giles). In light of the type and amount of work required and their isolation from mainstream Canadian society, it is their lack of English skills and education as well as loneliness that created immigrant women's greatest challenge to survive (Nunes).

The second generation women are those who came from Portugal before adulthood or were born in Canada (Giles, 2002; Noivo, 1997). Despite their historical invisibility, these Portuguese second generation women seem to be light years apart from first generation in their values, attitudes towards gender relationships and issues of sexuality, and emancipation in the household. Giles (2002) highlights the fact that all

have gone to school in Canada, are fluent in English, and some have college or university as their highest level of education. Some of these women work in retail, administrative, and clerical rather than labour-oriented jobs. In Giles's viewpoint, many second generation women do not accept the traditional gender stereotyped in the Portuguese-Canadian household, resisting the imposition of the traditions of their parents. Accordingly, Teixeira and Da Rosa (2000) argue that second generation Portuguese women struggle to redefine the boundaries of Portuguese identity and responsibility, seeking to change their lives beyond the microcosms of the home and beyond the Portuguese community. Giles discerned that although Portuguese second generation women accept wholly neither the culture of their parents nor a Canadian identity, they still identify themselves as Portuguese and were "more emotionally and economically tied to their parents' home than were Canadian born Anglophone working class women" (p. 102).

#### *Portuguese-Canadians' Identity and Ethno-Cultural Attachment*

Nagel (1994) defines ethnicity as a constantly evolving property of both individual identity and group organization. Being essential for our personhood, ethnicity is the cultural identity of a group or individual as a member of that cultural heritage (i.e., that sense of connectedness with the past). It is what Hall (1993) emphasizes as our collective "one true self," a continuous frame of reference that constitute "what we really are" or rather, since history has intervened "what we have become" ( p. 51). In the same vein, Hunt (2007) states that human beings tend "to conform to the beliefs and behaviours of their group" (p. 426) because there is a need for certainty as members of a group. Also Nagel points out that identity and culture are two of the basic building blocks



of ethnicity. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) assert that the majority of Portuguese-Canadian youth assume an ethno-cultural attachment with a hyphenated identity. However, some scholars found that Portuguese-Canadians are stuck in social limbo while juggling their ethnic identities (Noivo, 2000; Teixeira & Oliveira, 2004; Trindade, 2007). Morgado (2009) states that some Portuguese second generation did not want to be associated with negative stereotypes and do not want to identify themselves as Portuguese. Many second generation descendants frequently feel conflicted over separated ties and allegiances (Oliveira & Teixeira, 2004). Aligned with this perspective, Trindade explains that Portuguese second generation express varying views where some “feel more connected to the Portuguese culture, others may identify more with mainstream society” (p. 16). Nunes (1986) states that many second generation individuals become somewhat “bicultural,” that is they have the ability to choose aspects from each culture according to what they think is most suitable for them (cited in Trindade, 2007, p. 16).

Sowell (1986) postulated that when people immigrate they enter a state of disequilibrium that requires them to develop the skills to function within two different cultural contexts—their original culture and the rules required by mainstream culture. This process of acculturation is a personal, emotional, cultural, and spiritual journey and at least two generations are needed, and most of the immigrants are unable to capture the complexities involved. Over the past 50 years Portuguese-Canadians have had a continuum of adaptation being in a cross-cultural intersectionality of two countries, two cultures, and two identities. Cuccioletta (2003) defines transculturalism as the synthesis of two phases occurring simultaneously, one being a deculturation of the past with a *métissage* of the present. Its core is a process of hybridization, the coming together of two

cultures which are interwoven, but that one does not seem to be more prevalent. Hence, Portuguese-Canadians' descendants continue to progress with changing behaviours that complement the new social contexts that impact the way they face reality and thrive (e.g., Araújo, 2008; Giles, 2002; Noivo, 1997; Morgado, 2009; Teixeira, 2000; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2009).

### **Ethno-Cultural Groups and School Failure: The Educational Disadvantage of Portuguese-Canadians**

One of the major issues that affect the Portuguese-Canadian community is their academic underachievement. The Portuguese have been impacted by the demographic effect of their migration, as many of the Portuguese immigrants who came from rural areas of Portugal in the 1950s and 1960s were illiterate or had limited years of education. This has had a huge impact on the education deficit that affects the Portuguese-Canadian community, resulting in students having a very low secondary school and university graduation rate (e.g., Brown, 2006; Fonseca, 2010; Gomes, 2008; Nunes, 1998, 2008; Trindade, 2007).

According to the 2001 census, the proportion of Portuguese persons 25 to 34 in Toronto who have not completed secondary school is 33% (twice the average of all other European groups). The Portuguese and Bosnian groups have the lowest proportions of university graduates, 11.6 and 9.4% respectively (Ornstein, 2006). These statistics clearly illustrate that Portuguese students have continued to perform well below the average for children in their ages and grade levels. Ornstein (2006) characterized the Portuguese as one of the groups suffering “extreme disadvantage” (p. 51) and illustrates that the problem of Portuguese-Canadian underachievement in Toronto schools has not

diminished. However, Ornstein also noted that the education of young adult Portuguese-Canadian women is relatively higher than men's.

Research on the Portuguese community has attempted to identify reasons for academic failure. Noivo (1997), like Gomes (2008), identifies one reason is that young people start work at an early age to contribute to the family income. In the same vein, Fonseca (2010) in her study *Losing the Touch: The Early School Leaving of Four Young Portuguese-Canadian Men* highlights socioeconomic status, engagement in risky behaviours, and working while in school as the “major non-school related risk factor associated with early school leaving” (p. 17). She discerns on the student's habitus (i.e., one's social class) that determines the aspirations and expectations to continue with school. As Bourdieu (1986) suggests, it is one's location within the social structure that influences how an individual perceives and relates to his or her world. Fonseca shows that students decide to invest in education as “a direct function of their place in their social context and whether people from the similar context tend to be academically successful” (p. 29).

#### *Lack of Academic Attainment and Disengagement*

All children come to school with a variety of individual strengths and potential for learning. Yet children from communities that are more educated have advantages because they are pushed through broader social barriers (Morgado, 2009). In terms of the Portuguese population for instance, Literacy Profile of Ontario Immigrants (2000), rated 73% Portuguese immigrants aged 16-45 and 92% aged 46-69 with low literacy levels in Ontario. Nunes (2004) observed that 6% of the Portuguese population in

Canada has obtained a university degree and synthesised that many schools do not address the needs of working-class youth who face unequal opportunities in the education system.

There are various research studies that examine students' underachievement among linguistically and culturally diverse children. Studies related to low academic achievement among Portuguese-Canadians residing in Toronto highlight the discriminatory educational practices of Canadian schools and the continued marginalization of the community which perpetuates the Portuguese academic deficit (Cummins, 1986; Cummins, Lopes & Ramos, 1987; Gomes, 2008; Januário, 2003; Nunes (2004, 2008; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2009)).

John Ogbu's (1983) studies on ethno-cultural groups' underachievement in the education system are critical in determining how children will respond to the barriers that they face in school. He argues the mode of incorporation between ethno-cultural groups and the main stream is influential in academic success. Ogbu considers the link between parents' subsistence activities and the child-rearing practices they use as a unique way to look at children's development. He suggests that some ethno-cultural groups experience discontinuity in school because their cultural characteristics often have developed in response to their treatment by the dominant culture. Although Ogbu's theory of instrumental competencies and cultural discontinuity has not been studied in early childhood settings, it provides a framework for considering the cultural perspective in looking at ethno-cultural children's development. In addition, learning is significantly enhanced when it occurs in contexts that are both socioculturally and linguistically meaningful for ethno-cultural children (Trueba & Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

In the same vein, Cummins (1986), McLaren (1986), and Januário (2003) among others highlight the educational practices and policies in the school system on ethno-cultural students, namely the discriminatory effects of language proficiency on students' achievement. Cummins (1989) notes that all aspects of ethno-cultural students' experiences in their homes should form the foundation upon which literacy instruction in school should be built in order to permit both reading and verbal intellectual abilities. He further asserts that those who have strong "L1" (home language) academic and conceptual skills when they start learning English tend to attain higher levels of English academic skills. When these home language learners are confronted with a real context, they are able to add their own images of the world and their prior experiences to foster a real sense of efficacy in school. Hence, if the primary schooling is conducted bilingually through the home language and the national language, that is to say, when children are exposed to dual language patterns in home and schools they can catch up academically (Cummins, 1986).

In a study of grade 7 Portuguese-Canadian students in Toronto, Cummins, Lopes, and Ramos (1987) emphasized the promotion of Portuguese at the preschool age among Portuguese-Canadian students and showed that measures of students' discourse proficiency in Portuguese and English were strongly interrelated. Similarly, Marujo (1999), attempting to test the validity of a model proposed by Cummins in 1996, focused on a Toronto elementary school where an ESL project was implemented to help integrate Portuguese-Canadian students into the school system (cited in Nunes, 2004). Her research assumed that collaborative (e.g., the inclusion of first language programs in school curriculum) rather than coercive school practices would better assimilate students

and families and would lessen underachievement. Furthermore, Cummins argues that the culturally biased educational assessments, low teachers' expectations, as well as academic streaming and ethnocentrism in curriculum are counterproductive to the aims of the educational system. He notes that many ethno-cultural children have been poorly prepared in school in much the same way their communities have historically been ostracized in the wider society. Cummins states that the coercive power relations affect the development of language and literacy among bilingual students and that the educational intervention will be successful only to the extent schools challenge the power structure of society. In short, these studies assert that those who have strong "first language" conceptual concepts when they start learning English tend to attain higher levels of English skills and might catch up academically.

McLaren (1986) gives clues about teachers' perceptions of Portuguese-Canadian students in a Catholic middle school in Toronto's west as being socially different and inferior to the Anglo mainstream: "Students were viewed by teachers as 'working class' Portuguese as opposed to normal' middle class students" (McLaren, p. 208). He also referred to the educators' behaviour as discriminatory and stated that school played a role in constructing the academic failure of Portuguese-Canadian students. The aforementioned studies emphasize the implicit agendas of relationships of power played out within the classroom and are useful in redirecting research on the Portuguese-Canadian community underachievement. However, most empirical studies dealing with Portuguese-Canadian youth have neglected to ground their findings in the literature on ethno-cultural group achievement and fall short in analyzing the mechanisms behind the

Portuguese-Canadian scholastic underachievement, mainly the cultural duality experienced by many Portuguese descendants in Canada.

*Portuguese-Canadian Parents: Aspirations and Expectations towards Education*

Many studies focus on Portuguese immigrant parents' lack of involvement and support in their children's school achievement. Yet, there is no research that shows Portuguese parents value education less than other parents. Even for first generation who have eschewed education, they are hopeful to provide their children with academic success (e.g., Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1998, 2004, 2008; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2009). Giles (2002), for instance, argues that Portuguese-Canadians desire for their children to be well educated and integrated into the Canadian labour force despite the challenges of class and cultural discrimination. Even though many Portuguese immigrant parents lectured their children on the importance of a good education, the great majority did not have the skills to support their children academically. Their limited knowledge of the English language made it difficult for them to be fully aware of the Canadian school system (e.g., Santos, 2006) and also their belief that "the onus to educate their children lay solely on teachers" (Fonseca, 2010, p. 19).

Januário (2003) indicates that Portuguese immigrant parents aspire to have their children acquire a higher level of education than their own and are ready to support their children's education as far as they wish. Nunes (1998) and Morgado (2009) state that a large majority of Portuguese-Canadian students confirmed that their parents would like them to have a university education.

Over the last 3 decades there are other studies which examine the responses of Portuguese immigrant parents to schooling issues. While McLaren (1986) found that

Portuguese parents, as blue-collar workers, did not perceive education as a necessity to get a job, Nunes (1998) acquiesced that Portuguese parents value education as a path to their children's academic achievement. On the other hand, in Delhi and Januário's (1994) report *Parent Activism and School Reform in Toronto*, parents complained that they struggle to gain a voice "to penetrate the Anglo-hegemony of the Toronto School Board and the other school boards" (p. 42). Januário (2003) reiterates that Portuguese parents are actively involved in their children's academic life and are very concerned about the recurrent underachievement of Portuguese-Canadian youth. Fonseca (2010) highlights the lack of certain resources such as English language proficiency, knowledge of institutional policies, and culturally different ways of engaging in their children's education as determinant in Portuguese parents' inability to provide proper guidance and support.

### **Family: An Institution**

Family as a dynamic institution has evolved since the 18th century due to economic demands and demographic changes, having had an enormous impact on parents' child-rearing practices and attitudes towards their children. According to Elkind (1995), the modern nuclear family "two parents, with one working and one staying home to care for the children has been seen as the configuration best suited to the rearing of caring and productive citizens" (p. 158). He further explained that family and home were the safe ground for children.

The postmodern nuclear family is more permeable and less nest-idea. This family is but one of many family forms, each of which "can provide high quality child rearing" (Elkind, 1995, p. 159). With the acceptance of working mothers, maternal love has been



transformed by the new sentiment of shared parenting (p. 159). Individuals are more independent economically (Elkind; Shorter, 1976). Shorter put forward that postmodern family configurations can emotionally deprive children with their crisis and heavy divorce rates. Meanwhile, Thomas and Chess (1984) note that the idea of a conventional family (a permanent unit composed of father, mother, and children) as the only one to successfully bring up children cannot be sustained in light of evidence that various nontraditional arrangements have been found to be perfectly capable of providing all the love and security required to raise a child.

Family is crucial for a child's identity formation. It depends on the concept of family as a cultural and historical notion that changes over time (Cunningham, 1991). Regardless of the family configuration, all family life is edified on parent-child relationship, noting that the mother is usually the primary caregiver (Grumet, 1988).

### **Mother: Woman and Parent**

Ideally, mothers empower their children and provide them with the foundation to launch their future. Representations of mother in Western culture shape our feelings about motherhood. The image of the "mother" is of the ever-giving, self-sacrificing woman meeting all children's needs. This is a Victorian image, a socially constructed myth of the "good mother" designed to keep women in their place (Rich, 2007; Ruddick, 2007). That vision of motherhood is in conflict with the actual lives of women who, as employed mothers, feel divided in their private and public lives, calling for a balance between work and family and for shared parenting as ways of moving beyond stereotypical views of motherhood. Mothers, "regardless of employment, provide more direct care to young children than fathers" (Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2002, p. 21). Thus,

women in their different “voice” as mothers play an instrumental role in the formation and development of a child.

Grumet (1988) says that “the symbiotic, concrete, polymorphic, preoedipal attachment of mother and child links our lives across neighbourhoods, time zones and generations” (p. 26). It is a dialectical relationship between nurturing and raising children and their public project to educate the next generation. However, Ruddick (2007) presents a different aspect of thought which emerges from the activity of mothering. She argues that the role assigned to mothers is that of rightness and righteousness (i.e., they have to decide between what is appropriate and what is decent according to their maternal thought). As mothers, women prepare their children for good citizenship instilling the values important to the outside world.

Mothers’ rationales are derived from their own judgments and express the facts and values of their practices. A mother is “naturally” nurturing and a provider for her children. However, mothers face specific dilemmas in their biographies when they have to make decisions about which aspect of life should be prioritized. Hakim (2000) explains that women juggle their multiple identities as mothers, spouses, and professionals as they have to adjust their working patterns to their maternal roles. Some change their career directions because of factors external to their families, while other women choose a home life of raising their children rather than being employed or having a career. These women are stay-home moms (who remain at home for more than one year). There are also women that choose less demanding jobs when they have young children.

Mothers caught in the intersection of their household, their employment and career aspirations have difficulties in managing their lives. Between the amount of time spent on their jobs and their need to fulfill their family responsibilities, women have to deal with major responsibilities for domestic arrangements, particularly child care (Moen, 1996). Hence, the notion of mothering has to be reshaped (Hakim, 2000). However, all cultures contain practices that provide rationales for why beliefs and actions take the form they do (Ogbu, 1978; Rogoff, 2003).

Mothers' beliefs in what the children should become and which are their expectations towards their children's academic outcomes can be seen as the expression of a shared system of beliefs that are to a large extent rooted in their cultural backgrounds. For example, some Portuguese-Canadian mothers tend to value interdependence as a cultural skill in their children's socialization as a form of developing a reciprocal sense of commitment and co-operation with the family and community. Hence, by understanding these mothers' beliefs we can perceive their priorities and cultural motivations that underlie their maternal thinking: the way they interpret their own cultural values and articulate their goals as parents.

### **Child Care: Maternal/Nonmaternal**

With the industrialization era, women's work moved outside of the home, and the historical contours of motherhood changed as the driving force behind the early child rearing. Many women who had stayed in the home and whose primary responsibility was their children's needs and domestic duties entered the job market and no longer could care for them. Therefore, today the vast majority of North America's young children grow up in nonmaternal care (Brandon, 2004). He argues that the dramatic changes in

who rears and socializes these children have led the National Research Council (2000) to conclude that the use of home-based/day-care centres care has become the norm in North American society. Data provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, n.d.) indicated that in 2003, 64% of mothers with children under 6 years of age were in the labour force.

In Canada, the structure of the household has undergone significant changes in recent decades. The significant increase in the employment of mothers has created challenges in their households and in their children's education. Thus, from the earliest years many children are spending the majority of their days under the care of an adult other than their parents. For example, by 2004, most young children in Canada were spending some portion of their days apart from their parents, whether attending home-based or day-care centers (Ornstein, 2006b). However, one constant concern has been finding adequate child care arrangements (Covell, 1995a). In addition, a study entitled *Learning from Each Other: Early Learning and Child Care Experience*, carried out by Social Development Canada (ELCC Report, 2006) reported that Toronto is one among 11 Canadian cities that does not have enough day-care service for children up to age 12. "There are spaces for only (13.6% of children), especially considering that more than 70 percent of mothers with children work outside the home".

Unlike most other Western countries, Canada has no national policy on child care. This falls within the provincial jurisdictions that are authorized to legislate in this area. The absence of a national plan for child care services is a social policy gap and has ignored the changes in women's daily life over the past 30 years (2011 YWCA Canada National Child Care Report: Educated, Employed and Equal: The Economic Prosperity

Case for National Child Care, 2011). Nevertheless, the federal government has carried out some policy initiatives to support the cost of raising children in low-income families. Among many national children's agendas, the federal government established in Toronto 22 Ontario Early Years Centres (Toronto Report Card on Children, 2003). Furthermore, there has been considerable pressure on the federal government to implement a national day-care program on the premise that it will be helpful for child development across the country. In Ontario, after Dr. Pasquale's report *With our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* (2009), a full-day kindergarten program was phased in. Dr. Pasquale's report contains 20 recommendations on how to introduce full-day learning to Ontario schools. It suggests that kindergarten should be accessible to all children on a full-time basis, as his research supports the idea that early education is essential to a child's full development. As of September 2010, full-day kindergarten programs were available in nearly 600 schools in every school board in Ontario. In September 2011, this number will expand to more than 800 schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). While this may help some Portuguese-Canadian mothers, this may not be a grave issue for them as many rely on the assistance of home-care (maternal and relative care).

Children begin learning when they are born. As children are for the most part extrinsically motivated, how they spend their time before they enter kindergarten has an effect on their readiness for school. Therefore, early care and education are found to have profound influence on children's later life and has a long-term effect on their perceptions as learners (Brandon, 2004; Daniels, 1995; N. Dunn, 1981; Magnusson & Waldfogel, 2007; Rogoff, 1990; Seefeldt, 1990; Winter & Kelley, 2008). In this study "early

education” or “early care” is the crucial period during which children (2 to 3 years) through parental, caregiver interaction or day-care receive nurturing, nutrition, and stimulation. It transcends the dichotomy of formal, informal, private or public education. Daniels states that exposure to this early learning experience has a significantly positive effect on the social and emotional outcomes of 7-year-olds in all four subjects of reading, writing, numbers, and science. Early care and education are also a powerful tool for empowering ethno-cultural group students in their social, cognitive and early development (Brandon, 2004; Cummins, 1989; Magnusson & Waldfogel, 2007) and is the key to ensure kindergarten preparedness and that children will be ready to enter school.

### **The Dichotomy Between Day-Care and Home-Care**

Research has demonstrated that early education is very important (e.g., Brandon, 2004; Daniels, 1995; Dunn, 1981; Magnusson & Waldfogel, 2007; Reynolds, 2005; Rogoff, 1990). For instance, Winter and Kelley (2008) state that the foundation of an individual’s development is laid during the early years of life, particularly between birth and 6 years of age. O’Neill and Shultz (2007) assure that storytelling is a predictor of enhanced mathematical skills. O’Neill and Shultz note that preschoolers who tell stories that include many different perspectives do better in math 2 years later.

There are two bodies of literature with respect to day-care and home-care and their impact on child development. The burning question is: Where can young children best develop emotionally, socially, and cognitively?

### *Day-Care*

Literature related to day-cares/preschool defined as professionally run licensed child care centers has focused on children's emotional and cognitive development. Several studies suggest that structured cognition-based early education programs emphasizing linguistic and conceptual skills will enable children to better perform in public school (Rogoff, 1990; Winter & Kelley, 2008). Barbara Rogoff considers "children to be apprentices as they acquire a diverse repertoire of skills and knowledge under the guidance and support of experienced teachers or caregivers" (p. 7). If the child is enrolled at age of 2 to 3 in day-care, she/he can enhance her/his academic skills. In addition, empirical literature strongly indicates that quality early care programs improve school competence short term (McKay et al., 1985 cited in Reynolds, 2005). Winter and Kelley in their study "Forty Years of School Readiness Research" illustrate the importance of early intervention programs, their positive and lasting effects, and how they account for enhancing the development of children. Similarly, there is substantial evidence that emphasizes the importance of providing high quality learning environments that stimulate children's development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000 cited in Winter & Kelley, 2008). Lefebvre and Merrigan (2002) have a nuanced outlook: They recognize that early learning of emotional, cognitive, and social skills brings about later learning. Yet, they suggest that infant-toddler nonparental care has insignificant or negligible impacts on development outcomes (only motor and social).

Bronfenbrenner (2004) argues that the type of care received may influence the behaviour and development of children. Lefebvre and Merrigan (2002) note that day-care centers across six provinces provide care that is of "minimal to mediocre quality" (p.

2). Interestingly, many parents believe their children are getting the best care (Riley & Glass, 2002).

According to Brandon (2004), day-care might play a role in facilitating children of immigrants' academic success and could be beneficial to help close the gap in school readiness for ethno-cultural children. Magnusson and Waldfogel (2007) likewise, assert that day-care promotes "basic levels of language skills for children of immigrants, helps reduce the inequality in skills at school entry and facilitates their later school success" (p. 1258). According to Brandon and Magnusson and Waldfogel (2007), for example, immigrant children who attend day-care centers are much more likely to be proficient in English than those who remain home with one parent. However, Bernhard (1995) found that child development courses in ECE programs provide a universal basis for professional practice with children and adults without respect to ethnicity and culture.

Some studies offer a different point of view. They suggest that programs with cognitive-oriented curricula are detrimental to children's social and emotional development (Blok et al., 2005; Sylva et al., 2006 cited in Winter & Kelley, 2008).

According to attachment theories, the relationships between mother and child have potential consequences when this bond is impaired (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bretherton, 1992). Bretherton stated that a secure attachment relationship provides the foundation for a later autonomous functioning. Rutter (1981) took the position that the child might have a multitude of bonds that provide security, depending on the significant other's behaviour and interaction. However, Rutter agreed that among these attachments the mother is most frequently at the top of primary child care. Similarly, Neubauer (1985) stated that under normal conditions of mother-child relationships, the attachments to



other adults such as fathers, siblings, or other caregivers during the first years of life do not impair children's emotional bond with parents. Hence, day-care should function as a nondisruptive system, and the availability of various caregivers might facilitate the child's development.

The issue of whether day-care results in emotional insecurity remains unclear, even though Rutter (1985) emphasizes that the child's age is a special requirement since children under 3 years are more reliant on adults. Similarly, Winter and Kelley (2008) call attention to time spent in day-care which is associated with behavioural problems. In the same vein, Gamble and Ziegler (1986) noted the role of family stress and stressful experience influenced near-term or long-term outcomes. However, infants in day-care who were observed to be insecure have demonstrated superior performance in problem-solving interactions and tasks requiring persistence (Covell, 1995b). Likewise, Barnas and Cummings (1994) supported the notion that stability fosters the development of attachment bonds between a child and caregivers. They recognized that the caregivers' stability as attachment figures is crucial for children's attachment-related behaviours in day-cares. However, Levitt (1994) stated that cultural differences in caregivers' expectations for appropriate behaviour for young children could be problematic for their emotional socialization.

Finally, it is apparent from the literature that our actual knowledge of day-care on behavioural and social development of children is limited and inconclusive (Winter & Kelley, 2008). Moreover, the investigation has been conducted within centers that offer the same level of care and environment and are representative.

### *Home-Care*

Home-care, defined as the informal care provided for children by either parents, relatives, or a friend, whether in or out of the respondent's home, might provide children with the social, cognitive, and emotional skills necessary for their holistic development.

Moore and Moore (1990) argue strongly for the advantages of keeping children at home in the early years unless there is an important reason such as developmental delays. They note that children will take longer to build their confidence, self-esteem, and cognitive readiness outside the home. Aligned with this outlook, Seefeldt (1990) recognizes that only parents within the security of home could educate the young and early separation of parents and child should be detrimental. N. Dunn (1981) identifies parents as the child's first teachers and acknowledges parents' teaching practices and their roles in kindergarten preparedness. She argued that parents who have perceptions about their teaching roles have children "who scored higher on ratings of other school-related skills (e.g., comprehension, persistence" (p. 246). Stevenson and colleagues (1976) had predicted the maternal teaching effect in early care achievement (cited in Dunn). Gordon's (1976) study "Parenting, Teaching, and Child Development, refers that performance "at age 6 was best predicted by the parents' utilization of experiences that naturally occur in their everyday environment" (p. 48). Likewise, More (1975), in a discussion on the home's contribution to the growth of competency in children, states that mothers will teach in the context of "moment to moment" interactions, labelled as "on-the-fly" home learning (cited in Dunn, p. 248). Dunn further points out that parents who are aware of the significance of their roles facilitate the development of concrete verbal and math skills that are important for learning. Most of the teaching that parents do is of

an informal nature, as academic skills tend not to be taught didactically to children before kindergarten. Yet, better classroom practices were associated with higher maternal education and higher income (Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). In the same vein, Datcher-Loury (1988) found that greater child care time of highly educated, but not of less educated, mothers significantly raises children's years of schooling.

Malaguzzi (1993) believed that interaction among children is a fundamental experience during the first years of life and is a vital necessity that each child carries within. Children construct cognitive understandings, for example, through the interrelationship between oral language, storytelling, and games and play in the context of the instruction they receive whether in home-care or in day-care. Those in the field of early education have argued in favour of practices that emphasize social relationships and the opportunities that social relationships provide across domains (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Elkind, 1986) within a domestic or formal setting. Cochran (1977), for example, conducted a study on group day and family childrearing patterns in Sweden. He found that in two groups of toddlers, no overall developmental differences were found between the home-care and day-care. Yet home-care is perceived as lacking of theoretical sophistication and cognitive reasoning embedded on the patriarchal discourse of society (Grumet, 1988).

Burman (2008) suggested that the human being is born with all the human social characteristics and skills, but it is by treating the child as socially competent that she/he becomes so. Hence, I suggest that young children who are exposed to any form of child care with enriching learning experiences and in a nurturing and interactive environment before kindergarten (in either day-care or home-care) can boost their language

proficiency and their social, emotional, and cognitive skills. As socially competent beings, children develop gradually and at their own pace (Burman, 2008; Elkind, 1995).

Early care and education make a difference in child's development. Yet the quality of care young children receive establishes the foundation for their academic success. Even if quality care is available, many families cannot afford to pay for it and have to look for other care arrangements, namely relatives or babysitters. As well, there is a significant lack of spaces in the Canadian school system for early education. For instance, a study entitled "Learning from Each Other: Early Learning and Child Experience" carried out by Social Development Canada (2006) reported that Toronto is among the 11 Canadian cities that do not have enough child care services for children up to grade 12 (there are spaces for only 13.6% of children), especially considering that more than 70% of mothers with young children work outside the home. In addition, a diverse array of issues, including mothers' beliefs and attitudes about education, the availability and quality of child care, family economic status, and the strength of school-community connections can make a difference in children's social, emotional and cognitive development (Coleman, 1987).

### **The Importance of Early Care and Education on Adult Life**

Early education is a crucial point for intervention in order to produce prevention of problems associated with adolescence and adulthood. A consistent body of research suggests that high-quality early education can provide long-lasting benefits to children. For example, Woodhead (1985) argued that early education can serve as an "inoculation" against academic failure. In the same vein, Elkind (1986) stressed the early years of a

child's development as vital to her/his perceptions as a learner and to creating the foundation for school success.

Psychology can be more effective in telling us how children learn and how certain capacities within the child can be developed. Whether the object of psychology is what can be said in the learning process of a child, what can be done is the object of pedagogy—the pedagogic practices can improve the mechanisms of teaching and learning. In addition, the Vygotskyian theory that stresses the importance of social interaction in the growth of cognition is a very strong argument in favour of proponents of earlier educational experiences (e.g., Astington, 1998). In short, this study draws considerable attention to the importance of early education as the most important grade (Winter & Kelley, 2008) to meet children's academic achievement. The following theories will be discussed as very influential in child's early development to build the case that Portuguese-Canadian mothers' decisions about early education are very important for their children's school success.

### **Maternal Thinking Theory**

Developmental psychology coupled with pedagogy discourses provides the basis for understanding child development. Yet clearly no single theory has successfully explained mothers' practices and views about childrearing. A combination of factors coalesces and reinforces cultural, class-based, and gendered practices that are (in) congruent with children's needs. Maternal thinking theory, coined by Ruddick (2007), is women's capacity to develop strategies to preserve the life of the child, fostering her/his growth, and promoting her/his capacity to adapt and be accepted into society. Thus, these three interests that govern mothers' thought (child's protection/growth and adaptability)

entail work that is physically, emotionally, and intellectually difficult but also rewarding. Hence, mothering is a liberating way of knowing, and maternal thinking is an emotional and intellectual endeavour for both women and men. Ruddick characterizes mothering as a practice rather than a biological inheritability. She examines the discipline of mothering, showing for the first time how the daily work of raising a child gives rise to distinctive ways of thinking. Motherhood is a complex activity, a discipline characterized by a concern of preservation of children and for fostering their growth and acceptability. Hence, Ruddick describes maternal thought as a way of thinking, as a discipline in broad terms. Consequently, for Ruddick, maternal thinking is one of many forms of rationality and a form of knowing. She stresses the strength of mind necessary to do a mother's job, and she looks for changing the emphasis of mother's work from their emotive capacity to their ability to reason.

Maternal thinking is a form of knowing, not merely cognitive but affective and informed by love. Maternal thinking is one of many forms of rationality and incorporates feelings in its logic; love, fear, dependency, intimacy are emotions which bear on the way we live our lives. Maternal thinking can be the reservoir of nurturing experiences shared by parents in both their maternal and paternal roles.

Ruddick (2007), drawing on the philosophical tradition of Jurgen Habermas which treats thought as arising from social practice, highlights the value of activities conventionally associated with women. According to Ruddick's central thesis, maternal thinking develops values, intellectual capacities, and metaphysical attitudes that may arise from the daily work of mothering children regardless the caregiver (women or men, or by biological or adopting mothers; Ritzer, 2005).

Mothers have the tendency to focus on the mind of infants (Pelletier & Astington, 2004). Their maternal mind-mindedness is their proclivity to treat their children as individuals with minds. Hence, mothers are critical in helping children acquire a theory of mind which results in children's social understanding of the world that allows them to ascribe intentionality to other people's thoughts (Pelletier & Astington, 2004). Mothers, through their mind-mindedness, learn to notice, encourage, and support children as they grapple with making sense of their environment. Mothers mediate children to learn how to function socially, which permits them to meaningful participation in their social and cultural environment and their growth in later life. Maternal thinking assumes that the nurturing roles of mothers and fathers foster the development of their children in the way they view the world and they internalize attachments to "specific adult others." This becomes the formative sphere for such values as empathy, pity, and compassion, which are different ways of knowing. Ruddick (2007) represents maternal care as a discipline that involves both intellectual judgment and emotional investment. She draws attention to the act of knowing and an act of love. Attentive love or loving attention is a kind of knowing that takes truthfulness as it aims to serve lovingly the person known as a child.

Ruddick retrieves the complexity of maternal practice and describes, from a philosophical perspective, the thinking that grows out of the work mothers do. Ruddick further claims that maternal thinking represents a superior form of thinking through which women claim the power of their own minds. How can maternal knowledge attain wisdom? It is my understanding that wisdom is attained by certain societal transformation. Thus, maternal thinking is a belief system; when it expresses a view of reality, reflecting ways of conceptualizing phenomena, then it will be a way of being and

living, commonly encountered in any culture. Then maternal knowledge will be wisdom. And with wisdom people can create the future and grasp the present. It is when we understand maternal thinking as a principle, that is, how a different sort of work (maternal work) may shed light on the practical challenges of parenthood and influence public discourse (Ruddick, 2007).

### **Attachment Theory: The Child—An Attached Emotional Being**

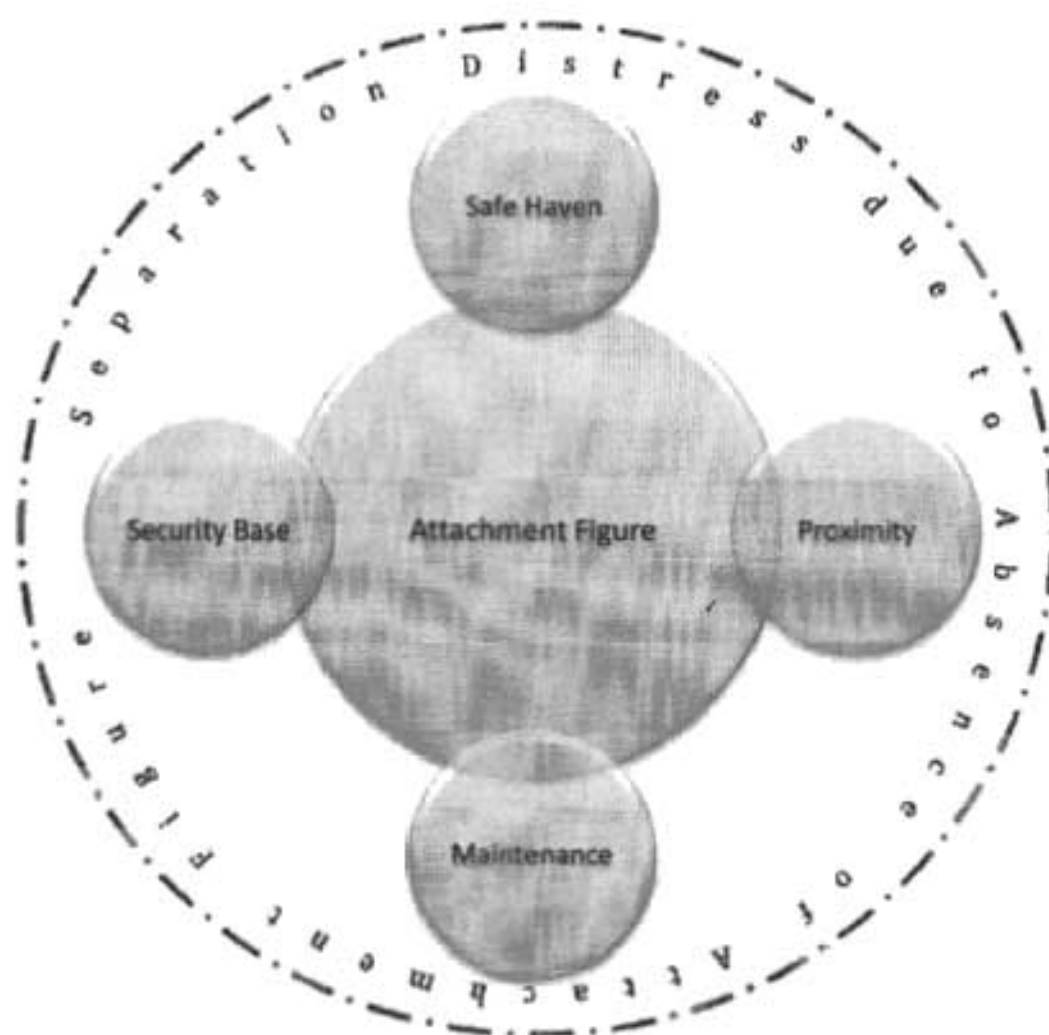
This study explores the importance of attachment as it is an affectional bond that involves an exchange of care, comfort, and pleasure. Some developmental theorists such as Bowlby (1999) and Ainsworth (1991) point to the predominance of the mother-infant relationships. Bowlby (1999) lays the ground work for the Attachment Theory, describing attachment as an emotional bond and a ‘lasting psychological connectedness between human beings’ (cited in Howes & Hamilton, 1994, p. 194). Bowlby’s original formulation of attachment assumed that the child’s mother is the primary attachment figure. He stressed the view that early experiences in childhood have an impact on development and behaviour later in life. In addition, Bowlby believed that attachment has an evolutionary component as it aids in survival the propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals is a basic component of human nature. Bowlby believed that attachment had four characteristics: proximity maintenance (the desire to be near the people we are attached to), safe haven (returning to the attachment figure as comfort zone), secure base (attachment figure as a security base) and separation distress (anxiety when the attachment figure is absent; see Figure 1).

Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) expanded upon Bowlby’s work and introduced the notion of “secure base” and a number of attachment patterns and used “the strange



situation protocol” to assess children’s union-separation-reunion with their mother (coined as secure, ambivalent-insecure, avoidant-insecure attachment). Main and Solomon (1986) added a fourth style known as “disorganized-insecure attachment.” Ainsworth and Bowlby contributed to the concept of attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world (Bretherton, 1992), and it is a very important approach to understanding the social development and the foundation of a child’s close relationships. Accordingly, infant development is viewed as evolving from the reciprocal interaction of child and caregiver (Vygotsky, 1978). So under normal circumstances, attachment to the mother or mother figure is a major force in personality development.

Within the attachment theory, a child with a history of secure attachment relationships is more likely to approach other people, including her/his peers, with positive expectations (Bowlby, 1969 cited in Howes & Hamilton, 1994). Attachment theories link to pedagogical approaches focusing on each child’s development and uniqueness. For instance, children classified as secure with their mothers are more sociable and positively oriented (Pastor, 1981 cited in Howes & Hamilton, 1994). Likewise, Lewis and Feiring (1998) argue that the quality of the early mother-infant



*Figure 1. Attachment theory.*

attachment predicts later social-emotional functioning. Hunt (2007) postulates that mind is constructed between the interactions of nature and nurture, that is, the infant's attachment to the mother or other principal caregiver develops over a period of 4 to 5 months in response to various acts of caretaking and expressive attention. The more secure children are about their caregivers, the more exploration of the environment, the more learning, the more emotional stability. Hence, adult caregivers who deal with children should be able to interpret their emotional needs and the appropriate response. Attachment theory provides the framework for understanding the human need for security and safety and the effects on individuals, through examining major events such as loss and separation. Although Howes and Hamilton (1994) argue that maternal attachment relationships at 12 months and at 4 years of age did not predict social competence with peers, Hirsch (2004) claimed that individuals who formed strong bonds through appropriate socialization were less likely to engage in deviant behaviour. Bowlby's and Ainsworth's legacy accounts for understanding a child's early social development and how children form close relationships.

### **Cognitive Constructivism Theory: The Child—A Builder of Knowledge**

Piaget's (1975) theory of cognitive constructivism provides a foundation for the design of early education activities that grant opportunity to integrate new information and knowledge into the learner's existing knowledge structures. According to Piaget's theory, children construct knowledge as a result of their active interaction with the environment and they learn by "doing" rather than "storing" knowledge as passive learners. The concept of cognitive structures is central to Piaget's knowledge construction in which patterns of physical or mental action underlie specific acts of intelligence and

correspond to stages of child development. He points out that children as builders of their own knowledge go through four major stages (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, formal operational) of cognitive development in a predictable sequence.

Piaget's (1975) perspective on learning as a cognitive disequilibrium is very influential in early childhood education. Younger children are immature, coconstructors of knowledge in relation with other children and adults. They are individuals in progress. As a modern grand narrative, developmental psychology explains aspects of childhood through systems of structures that are preexisting. This Piagetian structuralist theory has influenced childrearing practices (e.g., reward versus punishment instruction).

Piaget (1975) emphasizes the critical role that experiences/interactions with surrounding environment plays in student learning and stresses the development of naturally occurring stages, culminating in the attainment of scientific rationality. He depicted the child as actively constructing knowledge as a reaction to experiences. Piaget's particular insight was the role of maturation (simply growing up) in children's increasing capacity to understand their world: They cannot undertake certain tasks until they are psychologically mature enough to do so. His legacy is the acknowledgement of the interplay of reason and emotion. Piaget deals with the development of affection only in its relation to cognition (i.e., the two domains exist in parallel; they possess identical structures along with other underlying mechanisms). Piaget legitimized the forms of classification of stages of development as regulatory (i.e., cognitive development is a constant effort to the environment in terms of assimilation and accommodation). In this sense Piaget's theory is similar to other constructivist perspectives, namely Vygotsky's.

It is the child-centered pedagogy. Children are egocentric, participants of their own learning, and construct their own knowledge (Piaget).

Piaget as a developmental psychologist holds great influence on early childhood education, and his work on child development has been one of the important stimulants to much of the current research on infancy. Applying Piaget's (1975) theory to teaching practice in preoperational stage, which corresponds to the age of children of this research (2 to 3 years of age), learning should involve problems of classification, ordering, location, and conservation using concrete objects. In this stage language development is one of the hallmarks, when children do not yet understand concrete logic and cannot mentally manipulate information. During this stage, children use symbols, as evidenced by the increase in playing and pretending. In brief, Piaget provided an extensive and coherent set of empirical evidence which forms part of the taken-for-granted forms of pedagogy with a wide range of didactical methods.

Although Piaget (1975) and Vygotsky (1978) differ in their conception of the child's development, these theorists provide justification for a constructivist approach situated in a social context where children regularly interpret and make sense of their own worlds.

### **Cultural Cognitive Psychological Theory: The Child—A Social Being**

Vygotsky (1978), who was a prominent exponent of constructivism, theorized that social interaction shaped the intellectual development of individuals and stressed the importance of language in the development of thought. He recognizes that the infant comes equipped with numerous response tendencies that gradually extinguish during

childhood. These maturational changes of the child determine his experience with the environment (Vygotsky).

A child's socialization becomes increasingly effective as the infant's biological reactions lose strength. So, according to Vygotsky (1978), the child's natural determinant of behaviour dies out and the basis of behaviour is cultural; there is no longer the interaction of biological and social determinants of behaviour. Thus, the basis of behaviour is cultural and the child's personality is a function of her/his particular social experience. It is "socially constructed" (i.e., the child's higher psychological processes are formed by cultural processes and social interactions).

According to Vygotsky (1978), children construct knowledge through their engagement with peer interactions and through scaffold interactions with adults. His cultural-cognitive psychological approach explains that when young children make sense of social contexts, they engage in the same type of literacy processes as those engaged by older children, albeit at less sophisticated levels (Hart & Charlesworth, 2007).

Vygotsky's concept of "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) is the distance (gap) between the real and the potential level of development. This gap is mediated by competent peers (teachers or parents) and it is where learning takes place. This implies that most effective teaching is somewhat in advance of development. This implies that children are active participants in the construction of their knowledge (for example in the different ways that they talk, move, and relate to objects). Vygotsky emphasizes the role played by school or other informal educational situations as culture laboratories where the social organization of instruction is the unique form of co-operation between the child and the adult and it is the central element in the educational process.

Vygotsky (1978) put forward self-regulation, the internal mechanism that enables children to engage in mindful and thoughtful behaviours as the underlying skill that makes learning possible. Hence, development arises from social interactions, and this is a joint endeavour between the child and the caregiver(s). Thus, children's self-regulation behaviours in the early years predict their school achievement in reading and mathematics better than their IQ scores (Blair & Razza, 2007). For instance, Vygotsky's ZPD could be a zone of potential learning for students with educational underachievement, as they have the potential, yet they have to realize it; that is children may develop the abilities required to solve challenging tasks more and more independently under the guidance and in co-operation with more capable peers (parents, caregivers/teachers). Hence early education may be the foundation for the child's cultural development based on her/his social (interpsychological and intrapsychological) level and later on, on her/his individual level. Vygotsky's view of education is a broad process that originates in, and must be explained as products of social interaction; it is a process by which learners are integrated into community as coconstructors and cultural participants on the dialogical exchanges between the individuals and the sociocultural contexts where they live (e.g., Bruner, 1994). Aligned with this socioconstructivist tradition, Rogoff (2003) argues that Vygotsky reveals the "historical child" rather than trying to reveal the "eternal child."

Vygotsky's (1978) scientific legacy was his powerful trend away from the biologically based understanding of cognitive development of individuals. He emphasized the role that historical, cultural, and social factors play in cognition and recognized language as the most important symbolic tool developed by society. Hence,

knowledge is a social construct, and learning leads to development. Vygotsky's theories of child development have been supported by other researchers, in particular Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 2004).

### **Bioecological Theory: The Child—A Bioecological Being**

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 2004), a scholar in the field of developmental psychology, stresses the idea that environment plays the primary role in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of an individual. According to his bioecological theory, the child's development is determined by what she/he experiences in the different settings where she/he spends time. A child's experiences are the primary engines of human development. Ecological theory identifies levels of influence on the developing child, ranging from characteristics of the individual to broad cultural beliefs and values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Individuals' personal attributes are affected by and interactive with multiple environment systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2004).

It is what actually happens in the environmental settings like family and the child care centers that influence the child's development. Thus, the settings and programs influence the child's development to her/his potential. The child's development is a "phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings. It takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between an active child and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 2). Family, for instance, is the most important setting for a young child and has the most emotional influence on her/him. Specifically, the dyads of mother-child, father-child, and mother-father as the basis of early microsystem are the most influential at a child's early age (Bronfenbrenner).

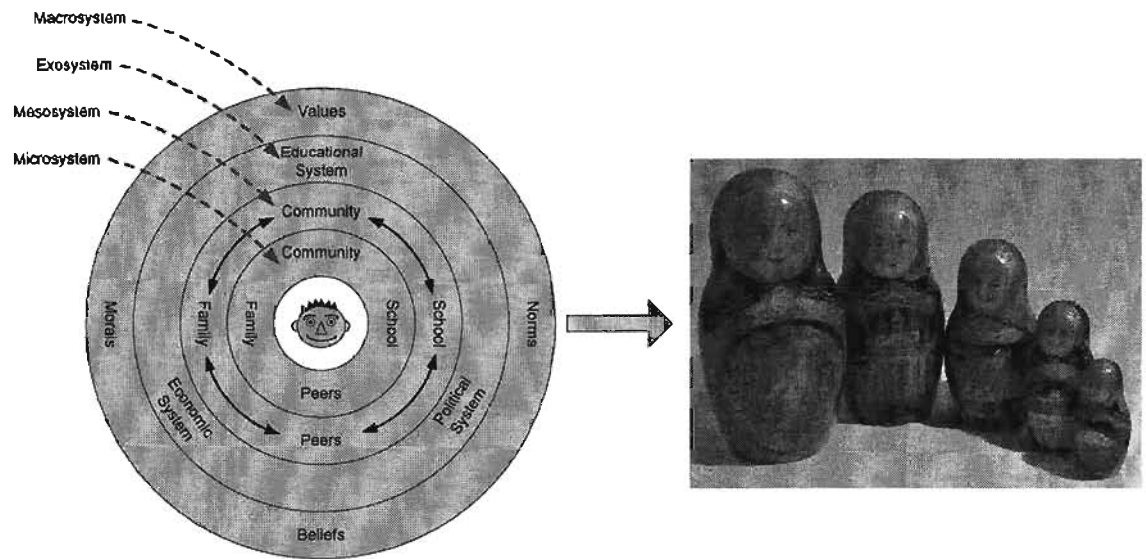


Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem is the first domain of emotions, those that are found within the family and that are central to a child's development (Plutchick, 1980).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of the ecology of human development acknowledges that humans do not develop in isolation but in relation to their family and home, school, community, and society. He recognizes that the individual with his/her personal attributes is affected by and interactive with multiple environmental systems.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) uses the metaphor of Russian matryoshkas (a Russian set of dolls of decreasing sizes nested one inside the other) to explain the four stages of his bioecological theory and how environment is a set of nested structures: microsystem (family/school), mesosystem (extended family/neighbours), exosystem (community services), macrosystem (ideologies of culture; see Figure 2). In this study, the model of the ecology of human development is explored as the representation of the Portuguese-Canadian child, and his/her physical and social environment are conceptualized as actively influencing one another in their reciprocal transactions.

The importance of sociocultural context is that individuals tend to model behaviour, beliefs, and values contextually, and these are learned through family, school, and community. These are external aspects of social and cultural domains that affect the conditions of educability and consequently child's development. These ever-changing environments are quintessential to human development. Bronfenbrenner (2004) emphasized the kind of positive experiences that a child experiences and that can keep them from physical or psychological harm. For instance, home-care and day-care can be contexts of human development. But the bioecological theory acknowledges that the



**Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's theory and Matryoshkas analogy.**

number and quality of connections between these settings have an important influence on the child's development.

Being childcentered and looking across the different settings rather than looking only within individual settings, this is a child-centered ecological model. As such, early education can count as an intervention step on the ecology of human development within the multiple nested-environmental layers of the physical and social contexts of family and school. Lazar and his colleagues (1977, 1978), conclude that "early education helps low-income children to meet the minimal requirements of their schools [and] can result in cost savings by reducing the rate of assignment to special education and/or the rate of grade failure" (cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 188).

### **The Importance of Play**

An informal learning environment encourages spontaneous play. Various studies stress the importance of play as an educational and scaffolding strategy and remedy in the social, cognitive, and emotional development of a child. For example, Hunt (2007) states that when children play they learn the first lessons in self-control. The work of Jean Piaget grounded "play" as a developmentally appropriate learning strategy for preschool children. The child's spontaneous creation of reality grows out of play-like exploration of objects. Activity, experience, and playing were placed together, and the work of Piaget provided the ground for such a move. Thus, children should be provided with the conditions for spontaneous activity.

Vygotsky (1978) strongly believed that play and social interaction facilitate and accelerate cognitive development in children. Children learn self-regulation best through activities in which children set, negotiate and follow the rules (Brodova & Leong, 2005).

This is a very important argument in favour of such proponents of early educational experiences as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner who placed play in a central role for young children's development.

### **Summary**

There is concern about the current state of affairs of the academic underachievement of the Portuguese community in Metropolitan Toronto. However, very little was known about the Portuguese-Canadian mothers' perceptions of early care and education for their children. In reviewing the literature, I sought to construct a framework for demonstrating that the early years of children's development are crucial to later academic success.

In the first part of the literature review, I provided a very short historical introduction to Portuguese diaspora in Metropolitan Toronto, exploring some of the characteristics of the Portuguese community as a way of profiling common patterns. I intended to understand the linkages between scholastic underachievement and the marginalization of the Portuguese community within Canada. Some of the literature reviewed demonstrated that Portuguese-Canadian children's academic failure is mainly explained by the discriminatory practices and policies of the school system. However, the lives of Portuguese-Canadians differ considerably from one another, and the existing research has effectively ignored ethnocultural diversity within the Portuguese community.

Even though recent sources have pointed to a continuing dropout problem among the new generations, many inferences about Portuguese-Canadians were not necessarily best decoded through a one-size-fits-all "culture" conflict. The interplay of ethnicity,

identity, belonging (or not belonging) will continue to pose a challenge for all communities that desire to have a stake in the future.

In reviewing the literature, there is strong evidence that good quality early care either in home-care or in day-care centers might boost the child's cognitive and social development. However, it appears that many critical factors such as child's ethnicity, disruption within the family, early entry into day-care and the use of poor quality care may affect children's academic outcomes.

Regarding Portuguese-Canadian mothers' choices towards their children's early education, I discussed the importance of their beliefs, their priorities, and cultural motivations as a way to understand how they articulate their goals as a parent.

In the second part of the literature review, I explored five theoretical frameworks which help to explain how children's development is shaped by their social and cultural contexts. Those theories emerged to build the case that Portuguese-Canadian mothers' decisions about early education and care are crucial for the scholastic success of their children.

Taking into account mothers' role in the formation and development of a child, I framed my study around maternal thinking theory with a rationale for addressing the Portuguese-Canadian mothers' frame of reference about the early education for their children.

Bowlby's (1999) attachment theory, which describes kinds of interpersonal relationships is prominent for its contribution to particular aspects of development. The role of attachment is discussed, taking the view that it is intrinsically knitted into child development. Regarding the role of attachment, I constructed a figure with the factors

that appear to overlap and complement each other. Piaget's theory (1975) of cognitive constructivism emphasizes the critical role that experiences or interactions with the surrounding environment play in a child's learning. Piaget's influence is very strong in early education. Vygotsky's (1978) cultural cognitive psychological theory places emphasis on social interaction. He also argues that self-regulation is a key attribute that begins to develop during the early period of life. It enables child to delay gratification and to improve impulse-control characteristics that are critical on entry to school.

The conceptual basis for many contemporary models of early intervention is Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (2004), which asserts that development does not occur in isolation. I use a model to better understand the interrelatedness of a children's development with the contextual influences surrounding the child. The home and preschool are the child's primary worlds within his approach on placing great importance on the co-operative link between young children's primary world and their future development.

The chapter concludes by examining the significance of play for the psychological, social, and cognitive development of a child. Play is how young children learn best. Hence, through playful experiences children develop social, language, motor, and emotional and creative skills.

The literature review discussed in this chapter provided the framework from which I conducted research with the Portuguese-Canadian participants and assisted me in analyzing the data. The following chapter identifies the research methodology carried out in this study. It encompasses the description of qualitative approach and the rationale

for the grounded theory research design used to collect and analyze data. The final section of the chapter discusses the research limitation and establishes its credibility.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

The purpose of this study was to explore Portuguese-Canadian mothers' beliefs and attitudes in regards to early learning and care for their children. This chapter describes the methodology used for the two interviews and the rationale for my selection. A qualitative research approach was used as a tool to gain insight into people's attitudes, motivations, aspirations, concerns, or lifestyles. Grounded theory was selected for the research design and is discussed in more detail as it applies to the development of a new theory. Details are provided in regards to the selection of the site, participants, and the recruitment process. Discussion about the procedures for data collection and analysis will follow. The chapter concludes by examining the role of researcher, limitations of the methodology, and the ethical considerations of this research.

#### **Description of Qualitative Research Approach**

We cannot understand human behaviour without understanding the framework within which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions. A qualitative study is a tool used in understanding and describing the world of human experience, how people make sense of their realities, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Maxwell (2005) states that qualitative approach is a systematic and ongoing process that involves "tacking" back and forth between the different components its design entails. It is something that goes on during the entire study, and its relation of cause and effect rests on the description of a visualizable sequence of events, each event flowing into the next (Weiss, 1994). As Walker and Holloway (1999) articulate it is its descriptive power that is useful when the research question relates to understanding a particular phenomenon about which very little is known. Maxwell suggests that a major



strength of the qualitative approach is in getting at the process and mechanisms that led to the outcomes, using valid and rich research materials. For example, data collection can be primarily in form of words and pictures which can describe situations and events in detail (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In the same vein, Strauss and Corbin (1994) argue that qualitative approach also seeks out the “why” and the “how” of its topic through the analysis of unstructured material, for example, interview transcripts, emails, notes, and memos. According to Hammersley (2000), qualitative research can provide valuable data to improve educational policies and practices because the research methodology is designed to inform and shape existing perceptions of practitioners and policy-makers at micro- and macrolevels in education.

The goal of qualitative research is to understand processes rather than outcomes and to explore how people create meanings out of events that happen around them. Qualitative researchers are more interested in the quality of a particular activity than how often it occurs; they are concerned not only with what happens but how it happens. By analyzing the system of participants’ beliefs they can tell their stories from their unique perspective (Gerdes & Conn, 2001). Qualitative research requires that people’s behaviour be understood as making sense within the context in which it occurs. In this case, the context includes how the participants perceive the environment and themselves.

Education has to be a source of empowerment. In this study, I addressed the Portuguese-Canadian mothers’ preferences and choices regarding the early learning for their children; therefore, a qualitative approach was implemented as it seems to be best suited for the research problem about which little is known. For example, there is a need to give a “voice” to Portuguese-Canadian mothers and to understand in depth their

maternal thoughts about early education. This research approach was implemented to collect data in the form of words which were used to describe situations and events with details (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). It also allows me to ask open-ended and broad questions that enable the participants to share their views about the issue being studied (Creswell, 2005).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to collect data from many subjects on a number of questions based on an inductive reasoning process where the research design evolves to make sense out of the interaction of lives with those of others (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Within the qualitative research approach, I chose ground theory as my process theory to identify the phenomenon I wanted to explore. Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, is a “systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic” (Creswell, 2005, p. 396). It is an evolving research method in which a theory is developed from the specific to the more general. It is not a refinement of a previously constructed hypothesis; rather it is a general methodology that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed, involving several stages, which is used to “ground” the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). According to Creswell (2005), this theory is a process, the vital component of which is to generate a theory which comes out and evolves during the research process due to the interplay between data collection and analysis of phases. Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out that grounded theory derives from the phenomenon it represents and meets four central criteria: fit, understanding, generality, and control. Fit entails that the theory fits the data. Understanding entails that the theory be comprehensible to all involved in the area of the study. Generality entails

that the theory is applicable in different contexts. Control implies that the theory should give control regarding the action toward the phenomenon. Creswell (2005, 2007) articulates grounded theorists proceed through systematic procedures of collecting data, identifying themes, connecting these themes, and formulating a theory which expounds the process or phenomenon.

As the goal of social research involving humans is often to describe and understand the rich and complex phenomena they engage in, this type of research design is more appropriate. Since very little research has sought to investigate the factors that contribute to Portuguese-Canadian mothers' decisions about the early education of their children, the aim of this study was to generate a theory grounded in or based upon the data collected. This study involves two interviews using two questionnaires. The research instruments were designed to frame two broad questions that will provide the flexibility to explore the phenomenon in-depth (Creswell, 2005, 2007).

### **Selection of Site/Participants/Recruitment Process**

The research for this study was held in the Toronto metropolitan area. The interviews were carried out in one of the study rooms at a local library that is discreet to ensure anonymity.

Due to the nature of my study, a small sample size was more useful in examining a situation in depth from various perspectives to discover variables and interrelations. As well, I gained a more personal understanding of the phenomenon. The participants were 9 Portuguese-Canadian women who were born in Portugal or Canada and have children 2 to 3 years of age. The participants were recruited from my network of women within the

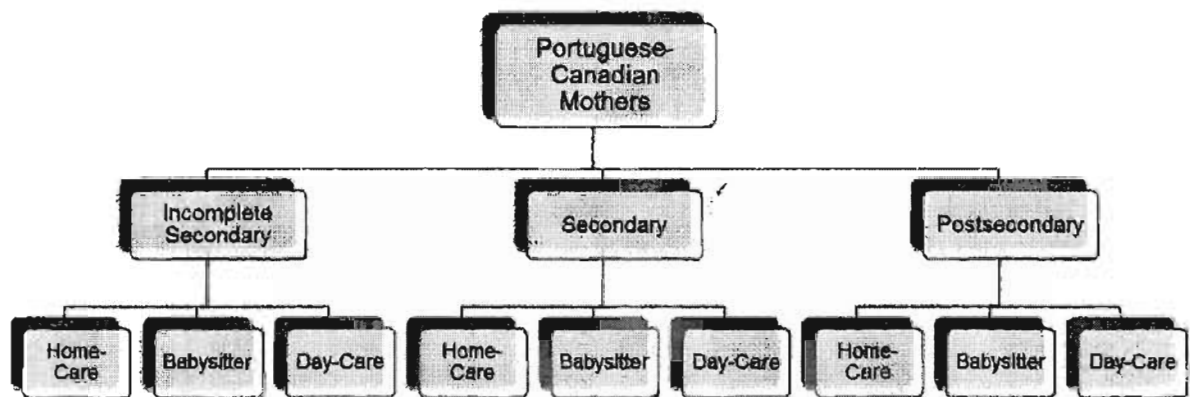
Portuguese community in Toronto. The respondents represented a spectrum of employment status, education level, and variety of child care use as outlined in Figure 3.

I made the initial contact by phone asking the Portuguese-Canadian mothers if they were interested in participating and explaining why they were selected. During the initial contact, I provided them with the basic information about the study through an invitation letter. Prior to the initial interview, all participants were provided with a letter of information containing the aim of the study, the rationale for their involvement, as well as the assurance that the data collected were stored securely. I further explained that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Prior to the initial interview, I sent a consent form in which each participant agreed to participate in the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Grounded theory is developed inductively from a corpus of data acquired by the researcher who tends to analyze data intuitively (Creswell, 2005). One important feature of grounded theory is the researcher's theoretical sensitivity (i.e., s/he has to understand the meaning and subtlety of data and has insight into the research situation). The qualitative researcher has to be theoretically sensitive to the range of conditions that might bear upon the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2005). Also, the researcher will need to recognize important data and formulate conceptually solid theory. Data should be actively and critically interrogated; therefore Glesne and Peshkin (1992) strongly recommended that all researchers systematically monitor their subjectivity.

Before I started each interview, I spent some time (approximately 15 minutes) speaking with each participant to establish a rapport, which was important in creating a



*Figure 3.* Participants of the study: Portuguese-Canadian mothers.

comfort level. I introduced the study and then proceeded with my questioning. I observed the participants' nonverbal behaviour and wrote field notes (before and after the interviews) to record "the surroundings of the interview and the participant's body language" (as per the style suggested by Morgado, 2009, p.49).

Walsh and Yallop (1993) stated that silence in an interview is frequently indicative of some kind of communication. Mezzei (2003) expands on silence as "‘privileged silence’ when participants revealed hesitancy to speak for fear of offending someone" (cited in Morgado, 2009 p. 41). Marander-Eklund (2008) defines laughter as an expression of emotion in stories. "It is a way of reducing the burden or the shamefulness of the experience that is narrated" (p. 97). During both interviews, I looked for linguistic implications that permeated throughout the responses. I observed the use of silence, laughter, and repetition as a means of expression and a way to provide insight to message effectiveness.

### **Data Collection and Recording**

In grounded theory methodology, data are collected in the same ways, using the same techniques as in other research methodologies (Creswell, 2005). Thus, my research as a qualitative approach confined itself to data collection primarily through three methods: one-on-one interviewing, recording field notes, and writing a research journal.

#### *One-on-One Interviews*

Interview. My rationale for using the interview was that it was idiographic, making inferences about social assumptions from individuals without necessarily being able to generalize them.

It is one of the most powerful sources of data in which we try to understand human beings (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Qualitative interviewing is self-evident and it draws on the everyday practices of asking and answering questions and the everyday identities of interviewer and interviewee (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Interview data can be used as a resource when the data collected reflects the interviewees' reality outside the interview, or as a topic, reflecting a reality jointly constructed by the interviewer and interviewee. The exchange of information and ideas through questions and responses will result in a joint construction of meaning about a subject (Janesick, 1998). The mothers in this study were asked to reflect on their beliefs, decisions, and choices regarding their children's early education, thus generating their own categories of responses to determine their experiences on the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2005).

Preinterview activities. Factors such as mothers' education attainment, employment status, and type of child care chosen were examined. This will facilitate future researchers who may be interested in replicating or enhancing this study. The circulation of the raw material and the names of the participants were never used in any publication, and the data collected about them were destroyed. Also they were informed how the results were used and how they could potentially contribute valuable knowledge to the Portuguese community.

Conducting the interview. The first interviews were conducted over four weeks. Each participant was invited to take part in a one-hour interview. The interview was unstructured and interactive in order to collect data that are retrospective and descriptive in nature. I utilized Patton's (1990) five basic types of questions: the background

question, the knowledge question, the values question, the experience question, and the feeling question (see Appendix A). The participants were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and to recall significant factors, events, or people that influenced their decisions about their children's early education in order to generate their own answers based on their situated experiences (Creswell, 2005).

After the transcription of the first interviews and after the preliminary analysis of the data, I began the second interview set. The questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions that were grounded on the themes that had come out from the responses of the first interviews (see Appendix B). At the end of the study the participants were provided with an Appreciation Feedback Letter in which the researcher expressed her appreciation for the interviewees' participation in the study. A summary of the findings was enclosed.

Interviews are social encounters where participants collaborate in producing accounts of their experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Hence the researcher had to conduct the interviews in a collaborative manner, where the participants might not feel uncomfortable, creating an interactive atmosphere. The researcher's technical knowledge and personal background could not shape the participants' points of view (Maxwell, 2005); hence, as the researcher, I deleted the judgment from the question to allow a normal conversation where the interview dialogue flowed naturally without being constrained by a structured agenda. I used a printed copy to assert my own questions, and whenever necessary I asked probing questions to help the participant think more deeply about the issue at hand.



Postinterview activities. All interviews were audiotaped. The process of transcription was very important as it enabled me to code the data to ensure comprehensive information. Transcripts of the first interviews were mailed to participants for verification and correctness. That way, participants had an opportunity to review the transcript of the interview and to make any necessary modifications. I intended to do some preliminary analysis of the data before the second interview session. In the second interview, I considered two main purposes based on my preliminary analysis: to get further knowledge of what was missing and to clarify and probe for more meanings to expand any vague points. A table was drawn with nine rows and nine columns where the data of each participant were categorized into themes. Each of the 9 participants' responses to each interview question was carefully classified so that the emergent pattern became apparent. The categorized data were used to describe, compare, and interpret the findings in an attempt to answer the research questions.

### *Field Notes*

As a source of data, field notes contributed to my understanding of the interview data. I took field notes before and after the interviews, and I elaborated on them in the memos immediately after the interview. As those memos were separated from the actual interview data, they were written as sleeve notes of the transcribed data and highlighted in color.

Data collection strategies are multiple, such as verbatim accounts, low inference descriptors, mechanically recorded data, and participant's review (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). According to Devers (2004), data must be captured and put in a format that is amenable to analyze. In this study, primary data from qualitative

interviews were verbatim accounts of what transpired in the interview sessions, which were audiotaped. The categorized data were used to describe, compare, and interpret in an attempt to answer the research questions. As a research tool, I used memos as analytical notes that one writes to oneself as one proceeds through the analysis of a corpus of data (Maxwell, 2005). Recording field notes and a reflection research journal were types of memos which the researcher used as a source of data during the interview process to collect and record thoughts and events to be incorporated in the study.

### *Research Journal*

As an additional source of data collection, a research journal was kept throughout this study to elaborate on ideas about the data and coding categories and to provide an in-depth view of the phenomenon. This journal enabled me to examine my goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings, and values as they related to my research. It was my identity memo, where I could sustain a continuous inner dialogue as the work proceeded. It played the role of a critical friend to assert the prior social and intellectual connections I had to the topic and to reflect on how my goals, background, and experiences informed and influenced my research. It was for my benefit as a researcher and, as Creswell (2005) points out, research journals help direct the inquirer towards new sources of data, shape new ideas to develop further, and prevent paralysis from tons of data. After I wrote analytic memos, I looked over my data again to identify patterns of behaviour in the participants and in myself. Those patterns were insightful, encouraging, or they caused concern. Hence a journal was a valuable data source where I voiced myself as a researcher.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

Data analysis and interpretation is a complex process which occurs after the data have been organized and described. According to Best and Kahn (2003), interpretation involves explaining the findings, answering *why* questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework. Creswell (2005) suggests that the premise behind qualitative research is an inductive interpretation and analysis of data which starts with small details and works up into larger themes. I reviewed my data carefully to identify patterns, recurring themes, and unusual evidence.

Merritt-Gray (2004) points out that in order to analyze data successfully, we must be flexible yet systematic in our thinking. As a beginning researcher, I wanted to stay close to the data to follow a step-by-step systematic procedure. Thus, I used the more structured approach of the systematic design for grounded theory identified by Strauss and Corbin (1994), which emphasizes the development of a logic paradigm and requires the data analysis steps of open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell, 2005). Therefore, I organized codes and sorted the data as well as created charts for visual aid in order to identify emergent patterns. I coded the data from each initial interview. While reading each interview transcript, I identified a list of recurrent words or phrases (in-vivo codes) (Creswell) and then I shortened them by combining similar forms of the same concept. Using grounded theory techniques, the data were analyzed using "a general method of (constant) comparative analysis" (Creswell, p. 406). Data were collected and coded simultaneously over the two interview sessions, with subsequent coding confirming, refining, extending, and modifying the data.

I used a double-entry research journal to assist me in this process. I reread my thoughts and ideas in the left column and jotted down my reflections and comments on the right. In the systematic approach the point was to gather enough information to fully develop the model (Creswell, 2005). Thus, I made connections between the macro- and microconditions which influenced the core phenomenon of my study, comparing the emerging scheme with the raw data to ground the categories in the information collected during the study. Thus, I developed a theory regarding Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices in regards to their children's education.

### **Limitations and Strengths of this Research**

There were some limitations presented in this research, namely, the fact that qualitative research dealt with subjectivity; it described the complexity of life experience and appreciated realities where holism and intuition were valued. Therefore, that fact often raised concern about the clarity, precision, accuracy, and systematization of the data based on the views of the interviewees. Strength of this study was its dependence on a small sample which rendered an in-depth understanding of the participants' life experience. However, I acknowledged that, although the results tended to draw conclusions on a small sample of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' decisions on the early care and education for their children, the findings may not be generalized beyond this population.

### **Establishing Credibility**

Qualitative research produces findings which arrive from real-world settings where the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally (Patton, 2002). As the researcher is the key person in obtaining data from respondents, the credibility of the study depends on

the researcher's ability to achieve consistency of data through the examination of raw material and process notes (Campbell, 1996). In searching for establishing confidence on the findings in research, Davies and Dodd (2002) developed the reconception of rigor by exploring subjectivity, reflexivity, and the social interaction of interviewing. In the same vein, Patton advocates the use of triangulation as a powerful approach that strengthens a study of a single phenomenon by combining several kinds of methods and data analysis. Creswell (2005) defines triangulation as a validity procedure where researchers search for congruence among multiple and different sources of information to form schemes or categories in a study. Therefore, I used triangulation as a process of establishing credibility and trustworthiness when conducting interviews, taking field notes, and maintaining research journals. I also corroborated evidence comparing the participants' different points of view and encouraged them to review the contents of the interviews to guarantee the trustworthiness and credibility of the research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I planned and conducted all research activities in compliance with guidelines established by the Brock University Ethics Research Committee (see Appendix E). To ensure that participants were properly informed, all participants were provided with information prior to the initial interview.

No participants were named in this study, nor could any comments be traced to them. Participants selected pseudonyms to assure their anonymity, and the interviews were carried out in a discreet location to protect confidentiality. For confidentiality of data, audiotapes and electronic data were stored in a secure location known only to me.

In terms of final disposal, all data were destroyed 6 months after the completion of the thesis.

Participants were aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time without need for an explanation. They were given transcripts of the interviews so that they could verify any information regarding the transcription itself. A final summary report of the study was given to the interested participants. Issues of ethics during the process were vital and required sensitive decision-making. Therefore, an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect with the participant was established on the outset. My fundamental responsibility was to ensure that participants did not experience psychological discomfort.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the beliefs, attitudes, and values of Portuguese-Canadian mothers regarding their children's early education. A systematic design of qualitative research was used in this study. This qualitative design allowed me to collect data from the participants' different points of view.

For the purpose of this study, 9 Portuguese-Canadian mothers were chosen. I used various means to inform the participants of the study, to keep confidentiality, and to guarantee the reliability of the data. As a researcher, I was enthusiastic, empathetic, and a sensitive observer and collector of data who attempted to systematically monitor my subjectivity.

I utilized the systematic design identified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to emphasize the development of a logic paradigm which requires analytical steps of open, axial, and selective coding. Using that coding process, I generated a visual coding

paradigm model. Using triangulation as a strategy to enhance the credibility of the study, I collected and cross-checked data using one-on-one interviewing via two different questionnaires, field notes, and a research journal. To conclude the study, I represented my dimensional model with a metaphorical figure. Even though I described triangulation as one of the several strategies to enhance the credibility of the study, there were research limitations and strengths that influenced the reliability and validity of this research. As I undertook the research, ethical considerations were paramount. The findings from the qualitative research were analyzed and are reported in the following chapter.

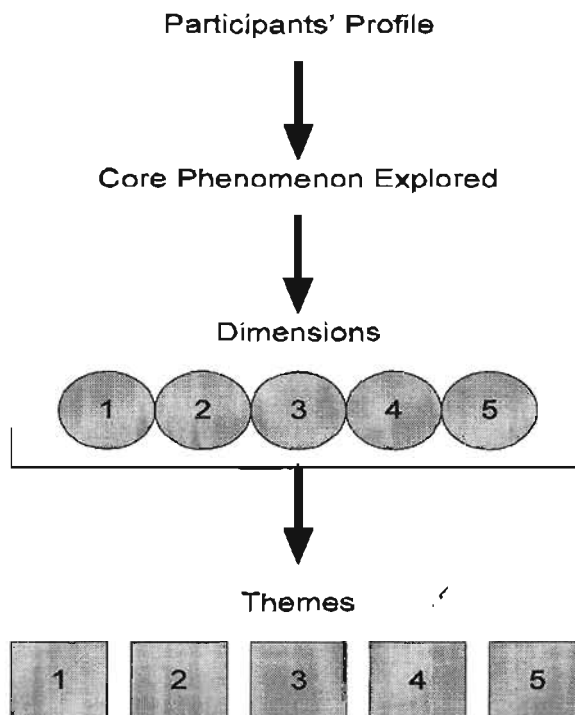
## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Whatever you are doing, however you are coping, if you listen to your child and to your feelings, there will be something you can actually do to put things right or make the best of those that are wrong. (Leach, 1997) *Your Baby Your Child from Birth to Age Five*.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore what are the beliefs, preferences, and choices of Portuguese-Canadian mothers regarding their children's early care. It focuses on the mothers' perspectives and the interpretation of their spouses'/partners' role, thus assuming that mothers are usually responsible for choice of care. The data collection strategy used for this study includes two sets of interviews with a group of 9 Portuguese-Canadian speaking women living in a large metropolitan area and who have children 2 or 3 years of age. In this chapter the findings are summarized using qualitative research approach, namely the grounded theory design. This theory reveals the interplay between data collection (interviews, observations, personal reflections, and researcher's journal) and analysis of data.

After profiling the participants in this study, this chapter consists of two major sections (see Figure 4). The first is the **core phenomenon** and five major **dimensions** of mothers' preferences and choices about care and early education. In the second section, five **themes** that were derived from the interview data, field notes, and researcher's journal are presented. Within each major theme, several subthemes are identified and described to support the main idea. The chapter summary concludes with a visual coding paradigm of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices generated





Note:

The **core phenomenon** was Mothers' Preferences/Choices about Care and Early Education.

The five **dimensions** identified were:

1. Match between Mothers' Preferences and Choices;
2. Mismatch between Mothers' Preferences and Choices;
3. Determinants of Preferences and Choices;
4. Portuguese-Canadian Mothers' Parenting Orientations; and
5. Portuguese-Canadian Mothers' Cultural Beliefs.

The five **themes** were:

1. Mothers' Identity and Cultural Attachment;
2. Daughter-Mother Relationship;
3. Participants' Parents and their Expectation towards Education;
4. Mothers' Role and their Expectations towards Education; and
5. Participants' Interpretation of Success.

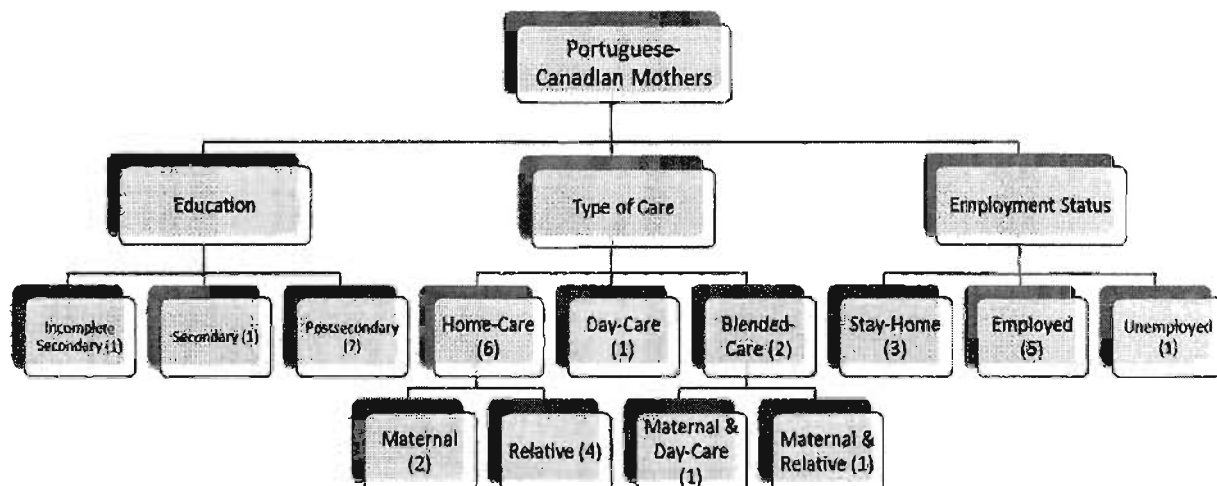
**Figure 4. Overview of discussion.**

from the data gathered from the participants in this study. Figure 4 is a general overview of the discussion that follows.

### **Participants' Profile**

The participants included 9 Portuguese-Canadian speaking women (who were born in Portugal or Canada) and had 2- to 3-year-old children. The participants' ages ranged from 25-40+. The participants were randomly selected from a network of women within the Portuguese community in a large Canadian urban centre and represented a spectrum of employment status, education levels, and type of child care arrangements. This small random sample enabled me to understand and investigate in depth the issues confronting their maternal thoughts about early education and care. When the interviews were underway, 4 of the participants initially selected for the study were unwilling to become involved for personal reasons. Thus, I recruited replacements from the community. Figure 5 is reflective of the participants that completed the study. The number of participants in each category is identified by this symbol '(#)'.

Most of the participants (7) had postsecondary education, 1 had secondary, and 1 had not completed secondary school. Three of the mothers were stay-home, 5 were employed and 1 was unemployed. With regards to the type of care: 6 participants chose home-care (maternal and relative); 1 chose day-care; and 2 chose blended-care (maternal and day-care, maternal and relative). They all identified themselves as being Portuguese-Canadian (versus just Portuguese or Canadian), all of them celebrate their heritage, and most felt rooted in the Canadian culture. They did not feel marginalized, and they were immersed in the mainstream Canadian society. Last, they valued the importance of intergenerational ties.



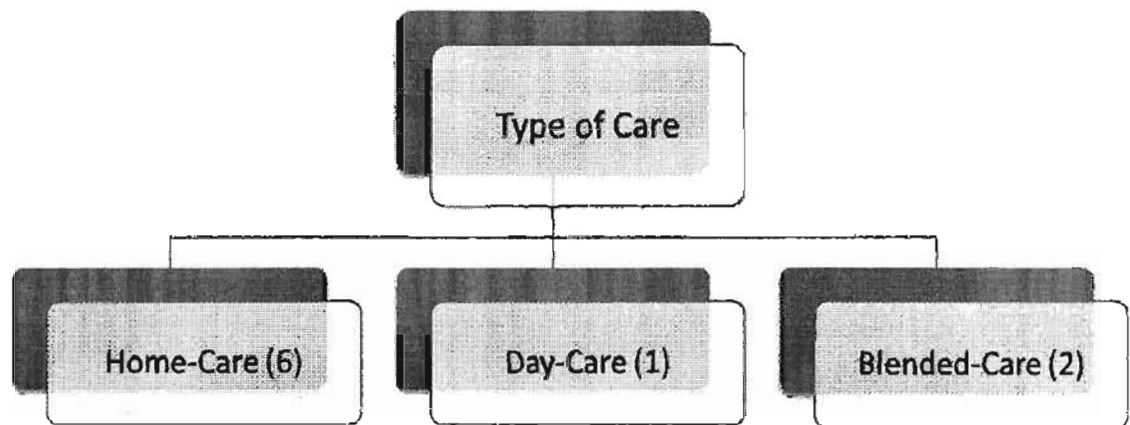
**Figure 5.** Participants' profile.

Many of the participants were willing to be involved in this study and enjoyed reflecting on their motherhood and care arrangements. Most of the participants were very transparent and wanted their voice to be heard. Several were articulate, confident, outgoing, enthusiastic, and very eager to be involved, while others were initially on guard, exhibited a hesitancy to speak about their ideas, but after establishing a rapport they responded effortlessly to the interviews. All the participants were trying to elaborate on the adequacy of their explanations to better describe their points of view. Interestingly, all were well informed and familiar with community care resources to select the type of child care preferred. Everyone mentioned that they accessed and researched the various sources of information that were at their disposal.

#### **Core Phenomenon: Mothers' Preferences/Choices about Care and Early Education**

The first rounds of interviews were conducted during the last 2 weeks of May 2010. The second sets of interviews were completed during the last week of June 2010. Participants were asked in the first interview to indicate what Type of Care they preferred. Despite the many types of care available today, three major categories emerged: Home-Care, Day-Care and Blended-Care (see Figure 6). Contrary to my initial assumptions, there were no participants that used Babysitters as a Type of Child Care. Rather, a Blended-Care category emerged.

Drawn from participants' responses, 6 participants chose home-care, 1 chose day-care, and 2 chose blended-care. Home-care is defined as maternal/relative care. Day-care is defined as a licensed child care center. Blended-care is defined as a blended approach of maternal and day-care or as maternal and relative care.



**Figure 6.** Type of child care chosen.

## Home-Care

Maternal care. Two participants preferred maternal care. They chose to be stay-home moms rather than pursue their careers. These mothers are concerned about the effects of nonmaternal care on their children and are less flexible about who could take care of their child in their absence. Otie expressed the essence of this idea as follows:

I take care for my daughter. At home I can provide a structured routine—education wise, and it is me passing on my morals and values. My belief is based on an education and understanding of the world around you. (Interview #1, pp. 1- 2).

Daniela chose taking care of her son because

I want to enjoy the first years of my son's life and read to him and teach him as much I can at home until he goes off to kindergarten. I feel like they [children] just need to be close because they grow up so fast they are small moulds as an adult.

It is important all the way around. (Interview #1, p. 1)

Relative care. Drawing from participants' responses there was also dependence on extended family to care for children. Four participants noted a sense of nurturing love, protection, and trust in the grandmothers' care and teachings. The following quotes elaborated on their statements.

"My mother wanted to take care of my children" (Sarah, Interview #1, p. 1). "I am most comfortable knowing that nobody will take better care of her than her grandmothers" (McLeod, Interview #1, p. 2). Similarly, Lily explained her decision: "I just feel safer knowing that he is with someone who loves him" (Lily, Interview #1, p. 1). Helen had a nuanced explanation for having chosen her sister-in-law to take care of her 2-year-old child: "It is more to help her financially; otherwise I would put him in a day-care" (Interview #1, p. 1).

### *Day-Care*

Whereas many participants value the extended family care, others did not concur and preferred to place them in day-cares. Isabella sensed her mother's disappointment when she decided to put her child in a day-care. She said:

My son is in a day-care since he turned 3 years old. He was with my mom and I did that because I guess it was a traditional thing and my mom wanted to. But my mom did not give him enough of the development and the social interaction that he needed...That is why I decided to put him in day-care. I pay a lot for day-care but I do not care...it is his education. (Interview #1, pp. 1-2).

### *Blended-Care*

Maternal and day-care. Vitoria chose a blended approach, with home-care during 3 days of the week and day-care for the other 2. Vitoria explained that her child stayed home with her for the first 2 years of his life. She said: "We decided that in his third year it would be best to expose him to a structured learning environment on a part-time basis (Interview #1, p. 3).

Maternal and relative-care. Samantha explained that she opted for blended care. "My son stays with my mom and myself". She emphasized: "my son does not have to share his attention with a bunch of other kids" (Interview #1, p. 1).

The following responses exhibited the different reasons for participants' choices. These comments were further categorized into properties as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Type of Care and Properties*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Type of Care</b>	<b>Properties</b>
Otie	Maternal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Structured routine</li> <li>-Learning tools</li> <li>-Physical and tactile activity</li> <li>-Values and morals</li> <li>-Play and run errands as learning opportunities</li> </ul>
Daniela	Maternal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Follow toddler's early stages</li> <li>- Play and run errands as learning opportunities</li> </ul>
Lily	Relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Respect</li> <li>-Nurturing love</li> <li>-Safety</li> <li>-Value Portuguese heritage</li> <li>-Exposure to Portuguese language</li> </ul>
Sarah	Relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Family exposure</li> <li>-Loving and nurturing environment</li> <li>-Social skill development</li> <li>-Exposure to Portuguese heritage</li> </ul>
McLeod	Relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Exposure to Portuguese Heritage</li> <li>-Family exposure</li> <li>-Social and emotional development</li> <li>-Loving and nurturing environment</li> </ul>
Helen	Relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Financial help towards relative</li> <li>-Social skill development</li> </ul>
Isabella	Day-Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social skill development</li> <li>-structure routine</li> <li>-cognitive skill development</li> <li>-kindergarten preparedness</li> </ul>
Vitoria	Blended-Care (Maternal & Day-Care)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social skill development</li> <li>-Structured routine</li> <li>-Values and morals</li> <li>-Caring and loving environment</li> <li>-Proper manners</li> </ul>
Samantha	Blended-Care (Maternal & Relative Care)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Caring and loving environment</li> <li>-Protection</li> <li>-Safety</li> <li>-Social skill development</li> <li>-Family exposure</li> </ul>



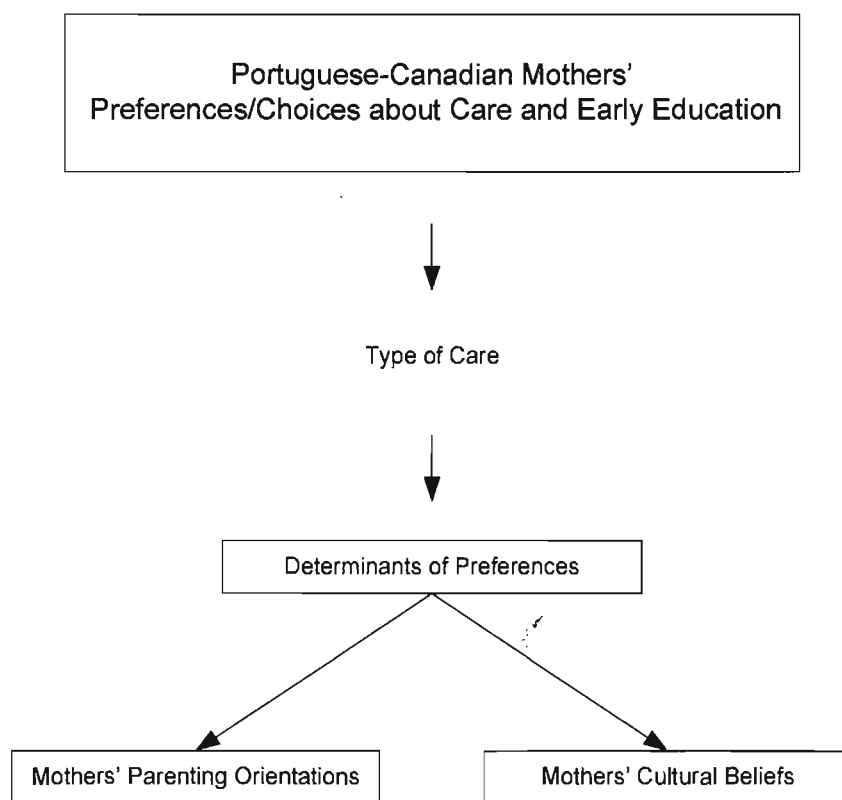
Table 1 shows the composition of each property based on the participants' care arrangements. Participants were thoughtful of their choices with regards to their child's care and early education. The discussion that follows focuses on five dimensions that take into account participants' responses regarding their preferences/choices. It is not surprising that participants' preferences varied due to their beliefs, personal experiences and circumstances along with family economic constraints. At the end of the section on dimensions, a visual model exhibits: participants' choices of type of care for their children, the determinants of their preferences and choices, their parenting orientations and cultural beliefs for the early care and education of their children.

### **Dimensions**

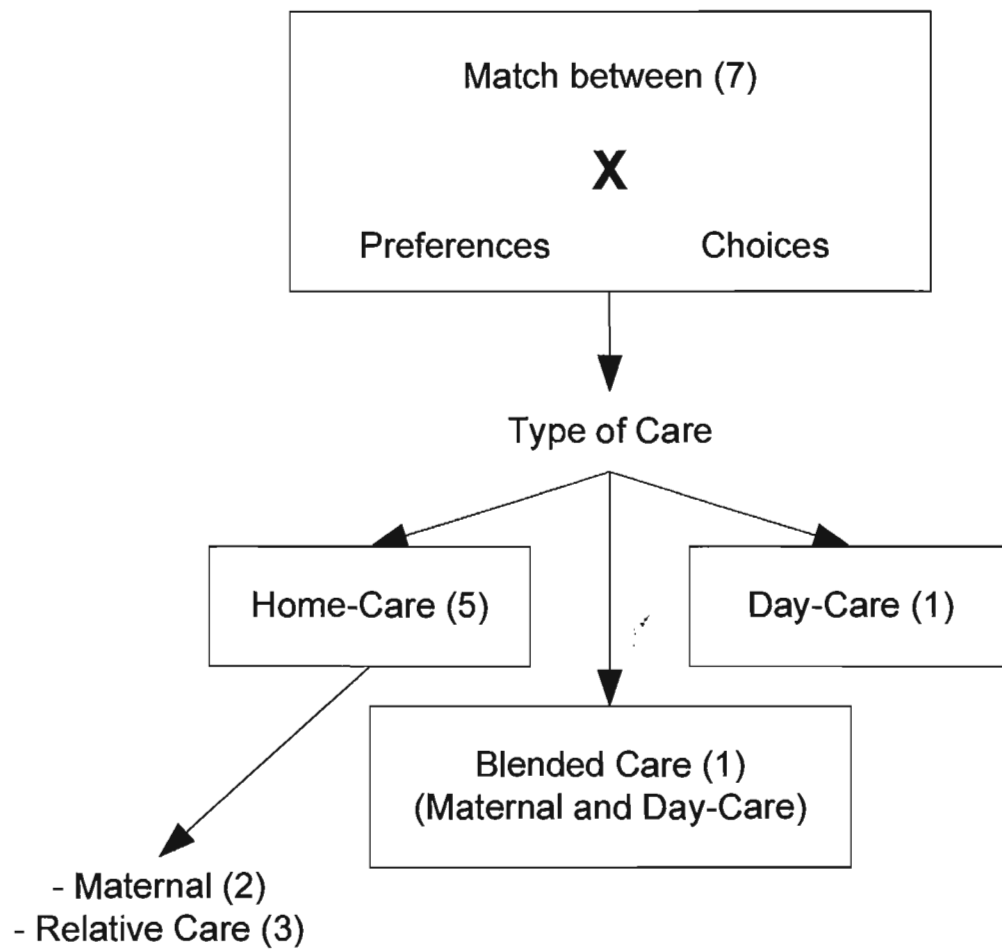
Mothers proclaimed various outlooks about child care and early education in light of their individual backgrounds and family circumstances (see Figure 7). Based on their preferences and choices, two main tenets unfolded: (a) match between their preferences and choices; (b) mismatch between their preferences and choices. The determinants of preference are also shown. The discussion is followed by a dimension on mothers' parenting orientations and another on mothers' cultural beliefs. Each dimension is discussed separately, and at the end of this section an all-encompassing visual model is presented.

#### *Match between Mothers' Preferences and Choices*

Otie, Sarah, Helen, Isabella, Daniela, Vitoria, and McLeod did not hesitate to indicate that their choices were aligned with their personal beliefs. Similar comments were made by some participants who facilitated a match between mothers' preferences and actual child care choice, as shown in Figure 8.



**Figure 7. Model of dimensions of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices.**



**Figure 8.** Match between preferences and choices.

Home-care: maternal. Daniela demonstrated her preference for Home-Care indicating maternal care. She noted: “As much as I can be at home...until he goes off to kindergarten” (Interview #1, p. 1). Similarly, Otie also chose this option. She said: “I take care of my daughter. I am a stay-at-home mother” (Interview #1, p. 1).

Home-care: relative. McLeod preferred home-care, namely relative care. She said: “There is no monetary value you can put on a relationship with a grandmother...I am most comfortable knowing that nobody will take better care of her than her grandmother” (Interview #1, p. 2). Helen also selected this option. She explained that her sister-in-law took care of her son because “it is more to help her financially, otherwise I would put him in a day-care” (Interview #1, p. 1). Sarah replied that “My mother takes care of my child just because I feel comfortable with her” (Interview #1, p. 1). Sarah also chose home-care with the assistance of a relative.

Day-care. Isabella indicated that her preference was “definitely day-care” (Interview #1, p. 2).

Blended-care: Maternal and day-care. Vitoria stated that her preference was the blended-care approach because

I have been home for 8 years raising both my children. I’m tired, I need a mental break, and I need some time for me. As with my first child, I also recognized that preschool was very important so that my children could be exposed to other children and to experience some form of structured learning environment...this will prepare him for kindergarten. (Interview #1, p. 3).

### *Mismatch Between Mothers' Preferences and Choices*

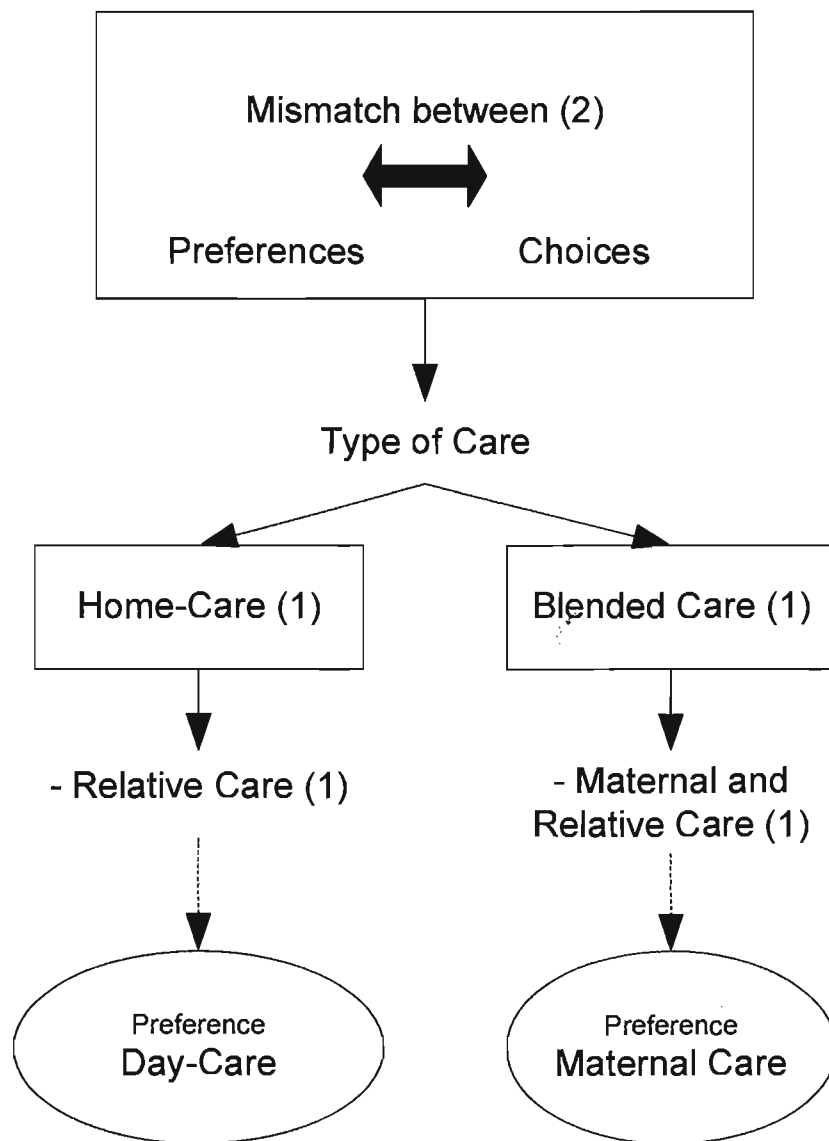
Frequently there is a disjuncture between mothers' preferences and the type of care choices they can get. Two participants felt that they would rather choose other types of care for their children if they had the option. Due to personal and economic circumstances both relied on both home-care and blended-care. Figure 9 illustrates this.

Home-care: Relative. Lily chose her mother as the caregiver for her son, but she would prefer day-care as an alternative means of care. Lily replied:

I would probably put him in a day-care. Day-cares are very valuable to a child's learning in the sense of providing more interaction with other children, more activity-based learning. So if I have more means, economical means, I would probably have him in day-care, but only some days so he could have the socialization with other children. (Interview #1, p. 1)

Lily's dilemma was better understood when she gave her explanation for the dichotomy between relative-care and day-care. "I do recognize that with grandparents children have a genuine kind of atmosphere but at a day-care they would have different kinds of learning-based opportunities" (Interview #1, p. 2).

Blended-care: Maternal and relative. Similarly, Samantha also had her mother's assistance in caring for her child. She explained: "Normally I would be a full-time employee. But after going back from my first maternity leave, they did not have a position for me, so right now I am technically a stay-home mom." Although she appreciated her mother's help, she added: "I would prefer in the long run to be by myself. It is less people interfering with my child's care and getting in the way"



**Figure 9. Mismatch between preferences and choices.**

(Interview #1, pp. 2-4). (Note: While Samantha in this conversation defines herself as a “stay-home mom” she does not fit the definition of a stay-home mom provided earlier in the literature review. Thus, I refer to her as unemployed.)

It is interesting to note that in the tenets discussed above, two profiles of parental orientations emerged: Mother as mediators: those who take an active role in providing a home environment where their children gain knowledge and morals; and the conventional mothers: those who see day-cares as providing their children with instructional tools for their academic achievement.

#### *Determinants of Preferences and Choices*

Regardless of the type of care setting, many variables interplayed when participants chose their child care and early education options (see Figure 10). The variables that are more prevalent in this study are: affordability; economic constraints/unemployment; child’s age; practical reasons; community child care resources; and cultural influence. Any or a combination of these attributes can affect participants’ preferences and choices towards early care and education.

#### *Socioeconomic Circumstances*

Some participants’ decisions were determined by their socioeconomic circumstances.

Affordability. Some mothers, due to their economic conditions can choose to be a stay-home mom. Others can afford to pay for a day-care. Otie and Daniela, for example, indicated that they were stay-home moms because it was their choice. They forewent their careers/jobs to raise their children as their economic situation allowed that to happen. “Unlike my mother who worked out of necessity, I forego my career to be a

### Determinants of Preferences

- Affordability
- Economic Constraints/Unemployment
- Child's Age
- Practical Reasons
- Community Child Care Resources
- Family Bond/Cultural Influences

***Figure 10. Determinants of preferences and choices.***





stay-home mother” (Otie Interview #1, p. 2). Daniela concurred: “A lot of women go to work but a lot of them stay at home...I can afford that” (Interview #1, pp. 1-3). Isabella chose a day-care. She reiterated that: “I pay a lot for day-care, but my son is more important to me and I would rather spend extra money...I spend \$1,100 a month but I do not care.” (Interview #1, p. 2).

Economic constraints/unemployment. Two participants’ preferences were bounded by external constraints such as their family income and unemployment. These variables affected their choices when they had to decide about their children’s care. The type of care mentioned by Lily was the most affordable and convenient option. Lily’s account captured the essence of the dilemma:

My child is with my mom, however, I would put him in a day-care if I could afford it. We just bought a house and that did come into play as well. I have to look at the big picture and see my comfort level. (Interview #1, p. 5)

Samantha implied that she would rather take care of her child on her own as opposed to having assistance from her mother.

Child’s age. Two participants preferred home-care in the child’s initial stages of life, but their choice will change as the child gets older. McLeod and Helen preferred relative care for their toddlers but they would change their preferences as soon as their children turned 2 and a half years. McLeod clarified: “Grandmother’s care will be a short-term thing. My daughter is 2 years and 3 months...but when she could speak well I wanted to start putting her in a day-care program” (Interview #1, p. 3). Helen compared a day-care to a school:

Day-care is more like a school; they have a schedule and it caters to a structure educational environment. It teaches the children to interact socially so that when they are ready for school they do not fall behind. He is 2 years old but I want him to start going to a day-care. (Interview #1, pp. 1-2)

Vitoria also had her child at home with her until he was almost 3 years old. She too concurred with Helen.

Practical reasons. Convenient distance from home is a determinant on some participants' choices of child care. Lily mentioned "convenience" for choices of a school. She added that "when that time comes, if my son stays with my mom or mother-in-law, it would probably have to be in a school near them" (Interview #1, p. 3).

Community child care resources. All mothers mentioned that they would gather together all available sources of information at their disposal: their network of contacts who give opinions and information on specific day-care centers/internet/community center. Daniela synthesized: "I will use the internet and word of mouth...and my friends who use child care in their life and ask them what their thoughts are" (Interview #1, p. 4).

Family bond/cultural influence. Lily captured the essence of most participants' remarks regarding cultural influence. "A lot of things would have influenced that [type of care] decision. I would say first and foremost my cultural roots, the way I was raised, the close relationship with my grandparents who I loved and cherished" (Interview #1, p. 5.)

### *Portuguese-Canadian Mothers' Parenting Orientations*

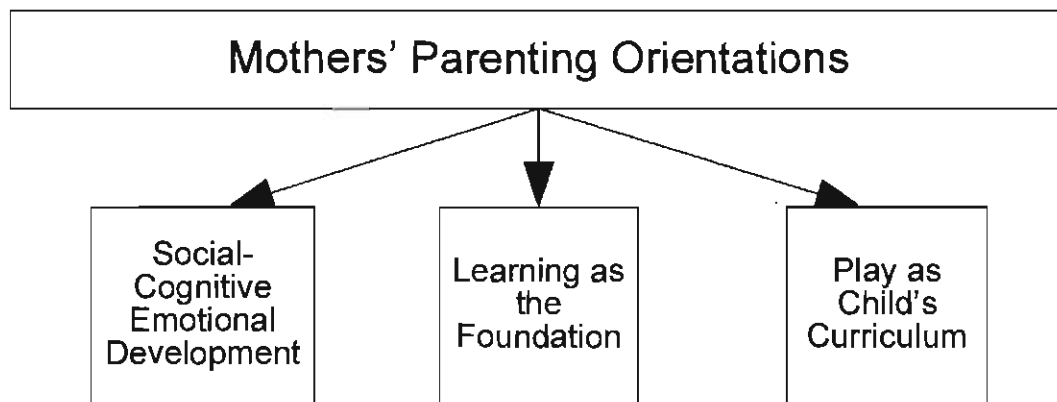
Participants' childrearing attitudes are very cohesive and supportive towards their children's care and education. When participants were asked about their parenting

orientations they attempted to find ways to express their beliefs regarding the children's care and education, how they guide and teach their children to perceive their social reality. Love is the implicit common denominator underlying all the responses.

One of the most important issues raised by the participants in childrearing was their safety and protection. These concerns were raised by all the participants and were overriding in the decisions made. McLeod expressed the essence of this idea in the following quote: "I never felt comfortable putting her in a day-care until she could communicate so that if something went wrong she could tell me. For safety....we live in a world where you never know what could happen" (Interview #1, p. 3). Similarly, Vitoria said: "If I was unable to care for my child, I would choose a day-care over a babysitter....I foresee safety in numbers" (Interview #1, p. 3). Lily defined "safety" broadly in terms of home as haven, "the loving and safe environment conducive to learning" (Interview #1, p. 2). Figure 11 outlines the fourth dimension and its subthemes.

Social-cognitive emotional development. Participants are engaged in their children's socialization and development (Field notes, Aug. 3, 2010). The following comments exhibit the importance of social, cognitive, and emotional development for children's future from the different perspectives of participants. As Vitoria mentioned:

I attempt to expose my child to many indoor experiences including cooking, story books, colouring, and with respect to the outdoor life I do errands, go to parks, street festivals, and nature museums such at the Butterfly Conservatory and the Aviary Museum. I try to stimulate my children as much as possible by including them in different kinds of activities. (Interview #1, pp. 2-3)



**Figure 11.** Mothers' parenting orientations.

Accordingly, Lily ensured that “the social skills are what help build the cognitive skills at a child’s young age. Each child will talk when they are ready, walk when they are ready” (Interview #1, pp. 3-4).

Learning as the foundation. Participants provided their children with educational tools and stimulated their learning during daily activities through storytelling, hands-on activities, and manipulatives. They value routine and exposure to external learning environments such as libraries, museums, galleries, and so on. Doing family errands was also a means of exposing children to learning opportunities. McLeod stressed the importance of sociocognitive skills in a child’s development: “I provide educational toys, to teach her how to identify colors, how to recognize the alphabet...she reads lots of books: thematic books...she has some activities such as leap-frog toys.” McLeod wanted her daughter to have a positive attitude towards school:

Children need to learn to interact with humans....My child is going to have conflicts and she has to learn to resolve those conflicts in a socially acceptable way. Decision-making and problem-solving, these are life-skills that you are never too early to start learning. I am trying to send to her the message that learning is fun. (Interview #1, pp. 2-4)

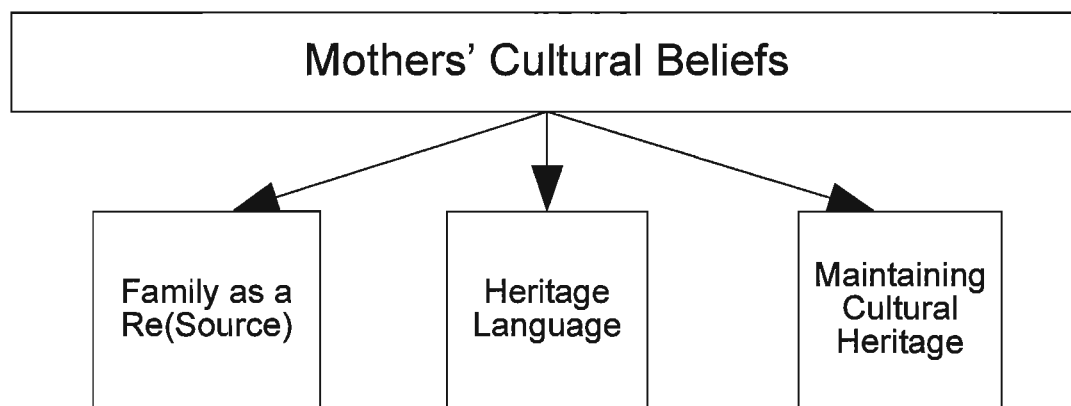
The following participants concurred. Isabella reflected how her decision could impact on her son’s future in the longterm. She explained that day-care is essential for kindergarten preparedness: “My son has been exposed to so many things. Celebrations, Olympics...I hope that he does not fall behind and be discouraged later on in life, not want to continue in high school or whatever” (Interview #1, p. 3).

Play as child's curriculum. Children learn through play. Informal learning environment encourages spontaneous play, and participants referred to the significance of children's play as a boost in their social co-operation and process of socialization and development. Daniela synthesized that: "Playing is one of the activities my son participates in our daily routines. I make sure we go on walks, go the park, go on slides, and explore. Sometimes we go with friends" (Interview #1, p. 3). Lily elaborated succinctly: "Right now at 2 my son learns though play skills" (Interview #1, p. 3). "When participants address the importance of play activities, they recognize that through play children's develop their social development and social cooperation"(Journal, September, 3, 2010). In conclusion, participants see their children's social, cognitive, and emotional development as key functions for their academic achievement.

#### *Portuguese-Canadian Mothers' Cultural Beliefs*

Maintaining family ties, cultural heritage, and language are essential for participants' definition of their identity. They stated that extended family was very important for their lives as they assist in passing on their cultural values. Figure 12 outlines this last dimension and its subthemes.

For instance, there is the inclusion of children in different kinds of family activities and family gatherings as Samantha commented: "Our family is pretty big, so my son sees all the cousins and plays with them. We visit a lot. My son learns to interact and share toys" (Interview #1, p. 2). Similarly, McLeod indicated that "both our mothers requested to take care of our daughter because they really wanted to do it. It is important



***Figure 12. Mothers' cultural beliefs.***



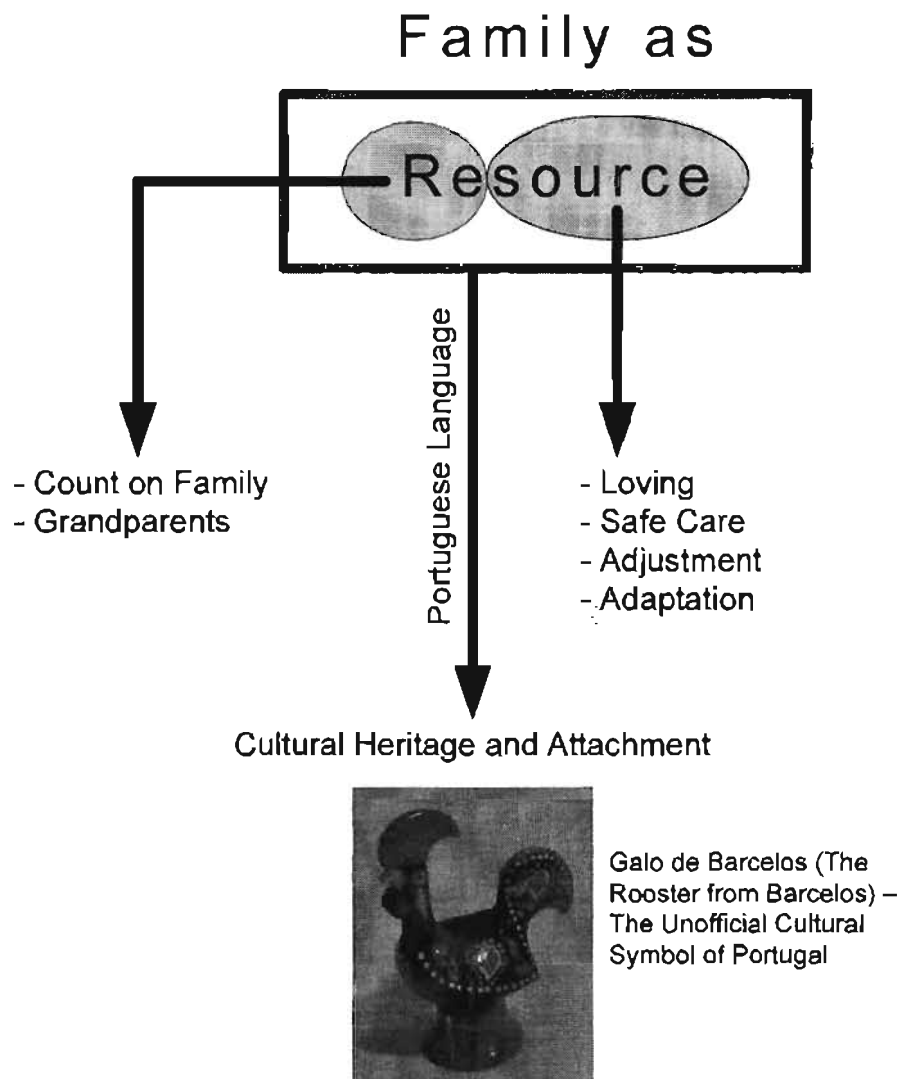
for my daughter not to forget where her family came from, so it is about family and cultural roots” (Interview #1, p. 2).

Family as a (re)source. Family in participants’ life plays a significant role as resource and source for maintaining cultural heritage and attachment via the Portuguese language. As a resource, participants can count on family, mainly grandparents, as a source of loving, safe care, adjustment, and adaption to society (see Figure 13). As Lily recounted: “Family is everything; there is nothing more important in life....It is how I started, why I am here and the love given by my parents....I want to instil that love in my son” (Interview #1, p. 3).

### *Maintaining Cultural Heritage*

All participants wanted to keep the family cultural heritage intact. Portuguese – Canadian mothers encouraged their children’s’ appreciation for the Portuguese language and their own cultural roots as a source of adjustment and adaptation. The following quote gave the essence of participants’ accounts: “My son is with his grandmother, who he really loves. She is instilling in him family values and how to cope being in a family; she opens up a door” (Sarah, Interview #1, p. 2).

Heritage language. Heritage language is instrumental in keeping family ties and cultural heritage. It is a tool for communication and a bridge to pass on traditional cultural repertoires. The participants wished to have their children speaking Portuguese and expose them to the culture of their grandparents. The extended family relationship is a means to achieving this and is required so that language and culture are passed on. McLeod epitomized: “I would like my daughter to learn Portuguese and develop



**Figure 13.** Family ties and cultural roots.

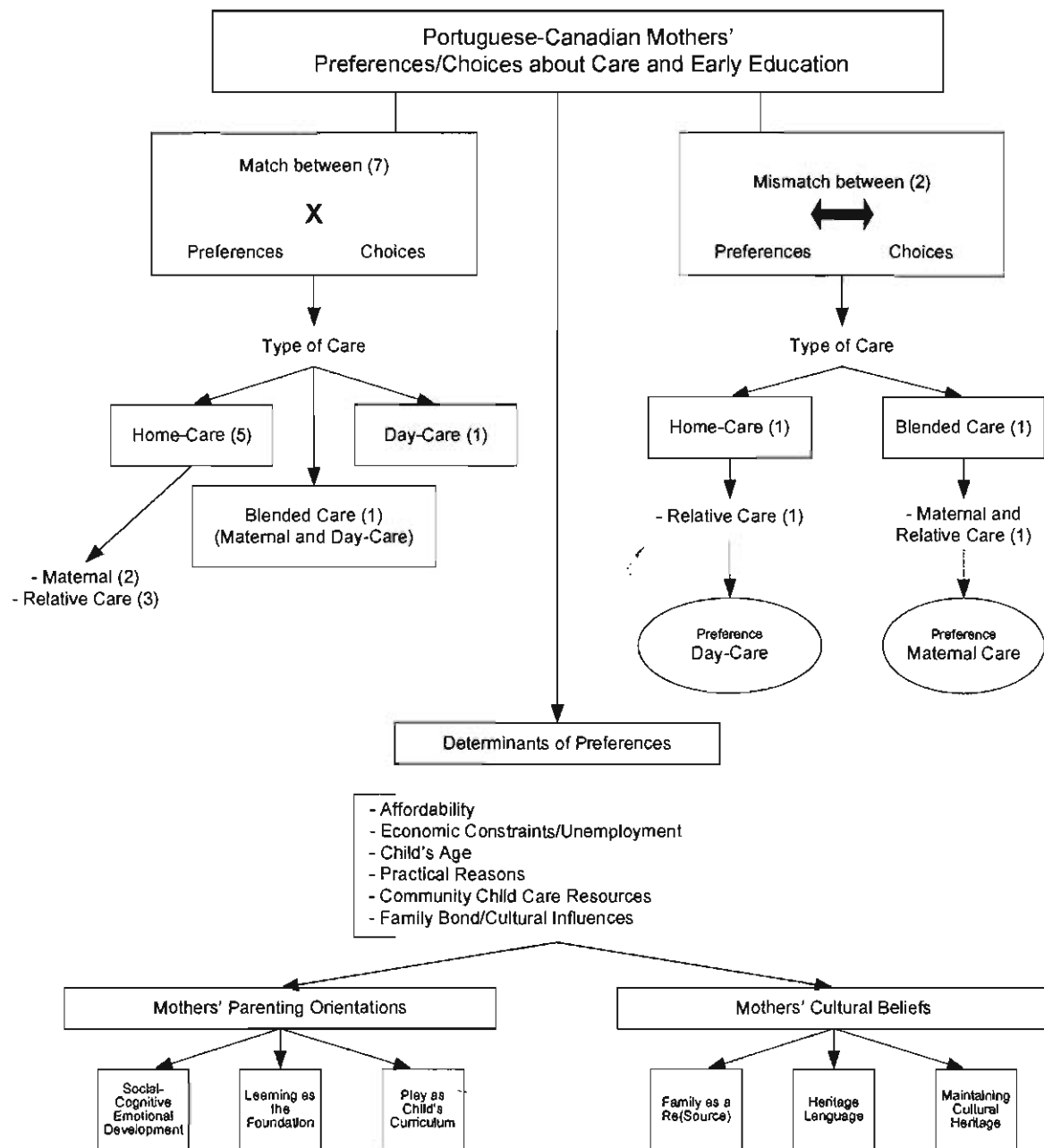
language skills so that she becomes bilingual and to be connected to my roots” (Interview #1, p. 1).

In short, participants’ child care ideas are shaped by their own upbringing and by their life experiences and family circumstances. Maintaining family ties and cultural roots is the basis to develop a love and respect for their cultural identity, which is the anchor of children’s individuality and an empowering strategy toward school achievement.

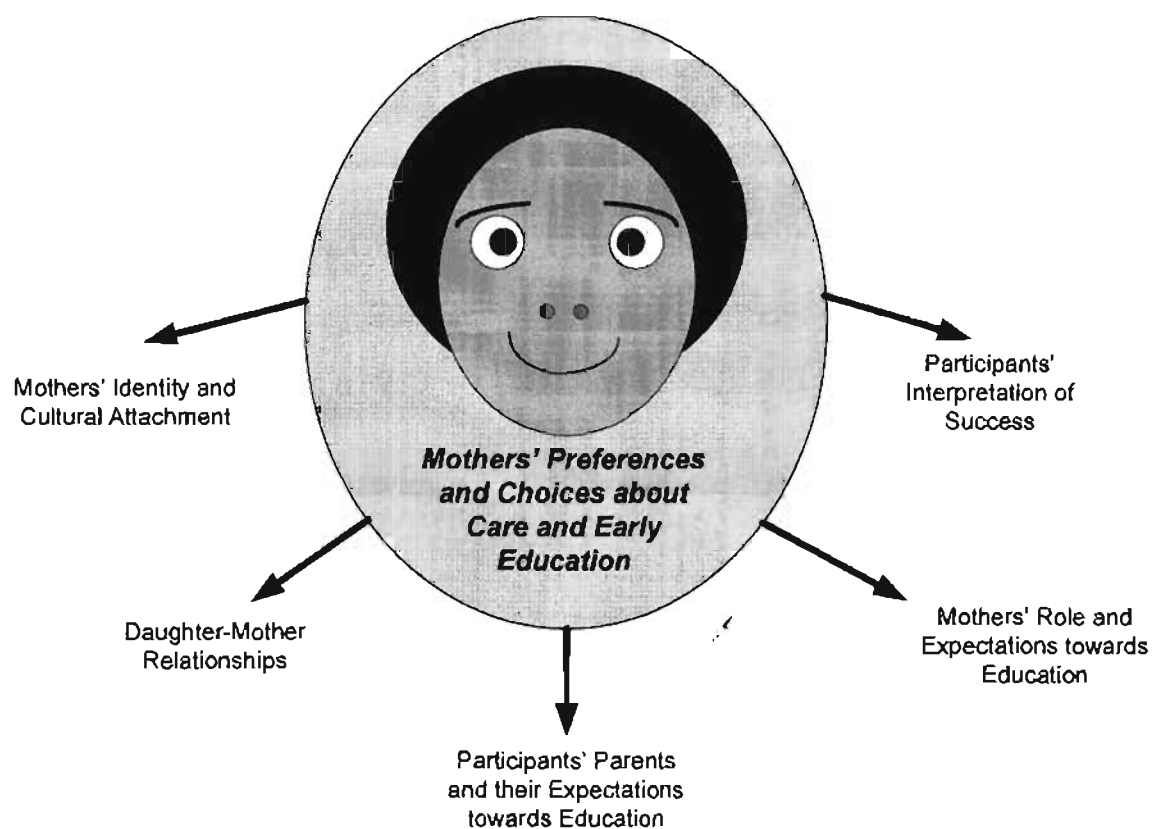
Overall, this section addressed the most important factors that define the core phenomenon and the five dimensions that impact participants’ preferences and choices about early care and education. This first section shows how all the dimensions independently interplay with the variables and how the participants’ preferences and choices were based on participants’ personal and family circumstances along with the cultural and the socioeconomic conditions that pervaded their lives. This discussion is summarized in Figure 14, while the second section that follows explores the five main themes (see Figure 4) related to Portuguese-Canadian mothers’ preferences and choices regarding early care and education.

### **Themes**

In the discussion that follows, five main themes (see Figure 15) related to Portuguese-Canadian mothers’ preferences and choices regarding early care and education for their children are explored. The model of themes of Portuguese-Canadian mothers’ preferences and choices is presented in Figure 15. This diagram provides a visual interpretation of the five themes that are both causal and conditioning factors that impact the core phenomenon.



**Figure 14.** Visual model of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices.



**Figure 15.** Model of themes of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices.

### *Mothers' Identity and Cultural Attachment*

During the first interview participants were asked how they identified themselves. Most had a strong identification with both countries: Canada and Portugal. They embraced their bicultural identity and were proud of their ethnic background.

Mothers identity. In their responses, they saw themselves as Portuguese-Canadian. Lily epitomized: "I would describe myself as Portuguese-Canadian" (Interview #1, p. 4). The following quotes support these ideas. "I was born and raised in Canada, and my parents have always taught me everything about Portugal. I speak the language, and a lot of my habits are very Portuguese" (Sarah, Interview #1, p. 3). Similarly, Helen added: "I am Portuguese-Canadian but I am very proud of my Portuguese descent because I am proud of where my parents came from and I am proud of who I am" (Interview #1, p. 3). Daniela, who was proud of her Portuguese/Azorean roots, noted: "I think that because my parents were born in Azores, Portugal it was such a big part of my life. I respect my culture, it is my culture, that is my religion, everything" (Interview #1, p. 3).

It is my observation that people think and feel a bit differently (Field notes, July 6, 2010). Unlike the other 8 participants, Otie showed preference for her Canadian culture. Her story stressed her Canadian identity, although she demonstrated her ambivalence.

I don't really describe myself as anything, but if the question comes up it depends on who I am talking to ... I am very patriotic. I love Canada! It is where I was born and raised. I do not equate myself as first and foremost Portuguese. I did not grow up that way. I grew up with both my parents writing and reading

English. It is my home, and yet, I still have a connection with Portugal...I would never turn my back on it or be ashamed. As I am getting older, I admire the Portuguese culture and feel it is important to pass on the culture to my children.

(Interview #1, p. 5)

By contrast, some Portuguese-Canadian mothers emphasized that their Portugueseness was the anchor of their individuality. Samantha commented: "I am Portuguese and I am Canadian...I am both...but I always related to being Portuguese more than a Canadian" (Interview #1, p. 4). Daniela and Sarah have coincident accounts: "I am Portuguese, even though I was born in Canada. I think because my parents were born in Portugal it was such a big part of my life" (Daniela, Interview #1, p. 3). Sarah said: "It is my parents' background, I speak the language, a lot of my habits are very Portuguese" (Interview #1, p. 3).

My observation is that a strong ethnic identity does not mean a low involvement with the Canadian culture (Journal, Aug. 2010) hence some participants articulated their pride and loyalty for Canada with the celebration of their Portuguese heritage. Lily recounted: "I am Portuguese-Canadian. I am very loyal to Canada and I am blessed to be in a country that celebrates heritage, but I have come from a family that celebrates our heritage, that is who I am" (Interview #1, p. 4). Isabella recalled a disappointing experience when visiting Portugal and regretted being deprived of family ties.

I think I am a Portuguese-Canadian, but I am very proud of where my parents are from. I had not been to Portugal in 20 years...I lost out on my grandparents...and I wish they had taught me more of the culture. (Interview #1, p. 5)

Participants also acknowledged their immersion in both cultures—Portuguese and Canadian—which gave them a sense of belonging and a definition of who they are.

McLeod metaphorically explained: “I love Canada...it is my home and yet I still have a connection with Portugal. It is like my cottage, my summer house” (Interview #1, p. 5).

Vitoria iterated that:

Unfortunately, my children no longer have grandparents for which they can learn about their heritage. Although I was born in Canada and my children were too, I am a proud Portuguese-Canadian, and it is important that my children be exposed to as much of the Portuguese culture as possible. I balance their everyday Canadian cultural experiences with the Portuguese culture by speaking to my children in Portuguese, frequenting Portuguese restaurants, bakeries, and grocery stores, and visiting Portugal on a frequent basis. However, I am realistic and I know that it is unlikely that their familiarity with the Portuguese culture will be as strong as mine. Regardless, they are getting as much exposure as I can offer them, and they will be that much richer for it. (Interview #1, p. 5)

Cultural attachment. Portuguese-Canadian identity shaped the participants’ lives and made them merge into their selfhood and attached emotional significance to their group identity, as “I am Portuguese as well” (McLeod, Interview #1, p. 5). Almost all mothers underpinned their Portuguese identity. Daniela described herself as Portuguese and has difficulty with her Canadian identity: “I am Portuguese” (Interview #1, p. 4). These are examples of an implicit linkage between their cultural identity and their self-esteem. The following quote epitomized the value of cultural and ethnic identity: “It is part of who we are” (Samantha, Interview #1, p. 4).



These participants did not identify with any stereotypes of inferiority when they praised their biculturalism. Concerning the element of prejudice, Helen captured well the core of this matter: “I am Canadian, but I am very proud of my Portuguese descent. I want people to know that as a Portuguese-Canadian I am very successful at what I do” (Interview #1, p. 5).

**Intergenerational Awareness/Understanding.** Participants attached emotional significance and cultural relevance to their group identity, emphasizing: family bond, heritage language, admiration, respect, love, and pride as the foundation of intergenerational identity.

**Family bond.** Samantha said: “I was raised by my grandparents and was often surrounded by my cousins” (Interview #1, p. 4). “Family is key—it is where I learned my morals and values that have carried me through my life and will help me in all I do, including being a mother” (Otie, Interview #1, p. 3).

**Heritage language.** The acquisition of language plays a crucial role as part of the child’s sense of connectedness. Sarah synthesized: “I speak Portuguese...it is a great language to learn” (Interview #1, p. 3). Language is an instrumental tool for family togetherness, “I want him to communicate with his grandparents” (Lily, Interview #1, p. 5).

**Admiration, respect, love, and pride.** These are the foundation of intergenerational ties and identity. Samantha synopsised: “It was the love of my parents that created our family. I want to instil that love in my son and I want him to love being Canadian but understand that he is a Portuguese-Canadian” (Interview #1, p. 4). McLeod said, “I hope that my daughter develops a love and respect for the culture and her

heritage, just like we do.” A similar comment was made by Helen. “I was brought up loving being Portuguese and celebrating heritage. Every time I go to Portugal, I make sure to buy more books because it is very important that he knows his heritage, his culture” (Interview #1, p. 4).

Lily summarized how her intergenerational ties have been passed on to her children: “I grew up going to Portuguese clubs, Portuguese mass, and family parties...I want my son to grow up understanding that he is a Portuguese-Canadian” (Interview #1, p. 4).

To sum up, participants brought light to their ancestry (i.e., they shared common cultural repertoires through responses which connect them with their past heritage and present culture). By and large, these participants revealed a persistent mindset regarding their Portuguese cultural identity and recognized that both Canadian and Portuguese cultures have come together to form their personal bicultural views concerning different aspects of their lives.

#### *Daughter–Mother Relationship*

A second theme of this study is the daughter-mother relationship of the participants. They narrated the different understandings and interpretations of their experiences as daughters and made meaning of their relationships with their mothers. A “mother” is a prominent figure in these participants’ lives and they praised their mothers. Furthermore, with most, there is a strong bond.

Sarah’s accounts demonstrated her attachment to her mother: “I feel very comfortable with my mom” (Interview #1, p. 3). Similarly, Otie spoke of how her mother’s influence was determinant on her life. “My mother worked out of necessity,

though she would rather be at home taking care of her children. However, her focus was always on education as pivotal in a person's life via experience and academics"

(Interview #2, p. 2).

There are multiple layers in participants' accounts regarding their mothers' guidance and/or influence: as a vehicle to pass on values and mothering beliefs. In terms of the value layer, Otie recalled her mother's influence: "My mother felt it is important to take care of children, the kids came first. I inherited her attitude, wanting to make sure the kids were number one. Fortunately, I had the option to forego my professional career to stay home and take care of my children" (Interview #1, p. 4). In terms of the loving, nurturing, caregiving layer, Sarah reminisced that she decided to have her mother care for her children because "there is not a better caretaker than my mom. Loving, cherishing, the whole bit" (Interview #1, p. 4). At an inspirational level, McLeod pointed out:

My daughter cooks with me...I have to thank my mom for this because from an early age my mother was a firm believer in "let your kids see what you are doing because they are curious"...I grew up with a lot of my friends who were not allowed in the kitchen to cook, because the moms did not want the kitchen to be messy. (Interview #1, p. 3)

Contrary to the above, I also observed the unwritten code of silence that permeated Isabella's and Vitoria's responses—not as a lack of sound but as their interior stillness. Isabella said: "When I first went back to work my son was with my mom, and I did that because I guess it is a traditional, cultural thing." But Isabella was reluctant to speak about her mother as a caregiver: "Do not get me wrong...the way my mom takes

care of my son is by turning on the TV, then she cleans the dishes and makes lunch, whatever...my mother is not interacting with him” (Interview #1, p. 1). Isabella chose day-care over her mother’s care and recognized her mother was resentful, stating: “It’s hard, she had a hard time with it she felt hurt (Interview #1, p. 6). Vitoria’s remark was more profound.

Other than the love and caring that my mother could offer my children, I feel that my children would not have benefited from my mother’s care. My mother did not have the intellectual capability to stimulate my children. I know because she was not capable of doing this with me. My mom would have been able to pass along the cultural values and traditions, but I feel that it is not just about tending to my children. I believe in “care” as a means of also “educating” them. (Interview #1, p. 5)

It is completely understandable, as these participants’ mothers were immigrants and were driven by the hardships of raising, caring for, and tending to their families (Field notes, 2010).

Participants were driven by the role that their mothers had in their lives, as sources of inspiration and guidance for their children’s care. This is synthesized in Samantha’s remark: “It is the way I was raised” (Interview #1, p. 5). In their weaving of facts, participants have appreciation for their mothers and “reconciled with their past through the celebration of their bond with their mothers” (Diary, Aug. 2010). McLeod captured the subtlety of her mother’s legacy: “I have to thank my mom...she gave meaning to her memories in an effort to create for myself an identity that was profoundly Portuguese” (Interview #1, p. 3).

### *Participants' Parents and their Expectations Towards Education*

Throughout this study, the theme of Portuguese immigrants' orientations and expectations about education for their children repeatedly surfaced as a factor in understanding the causes of Portuguese-Canadian academic underachievement. Based on feedback from participants, the relevant data were categorized into two subthemes: parents' orientations/concerns toward education and parents' expectations towards education. The following focuses on these two subthemes in detail.

Parents' Orientations/Concerns towards Education. In terms of understanding Portuguese immigrant parents' orientations and concerns about education for their children, the findings of this study parallel the reviewed literature in that there are diverse opinions regarding this matter. The following quotes exhibit the comments with respect to this topic. Isabella noted:

My parents immigrated at a time when the "rural culture" did not understand the value of strong education and those enhanced programs from an early age (because when they went to school at age 7 they only completed a few grades before going to work). (Interview #1, p. 4)

Similarly, McLeod commented: "I do not believe education was a priority for my parents because their sole concern was finding someone affordable who could take care of their children. Only when I became older, my mother became more involved, emphasizing the importance of doing well in school" (Interview #2, p. 2).

Preschool was not a priority. These participants' parents' orientations and concerns were related to their experience as immigrants, and "it is obvious that the community of origin of these participants faced a very challenging experience adapting to

life in Canada (Journal, July 30, 2010). For example, McLeod asserted: “I place more of a priority on ensuring my daughter achieves certain milestones before beginning kindergarten, whereas this was not a concern to my parents. Their mentality was such that they believed I would learn everything I needed to learn once I started school” (Interview #2, p. 2).

Parents’ expectations towards education. The value that some immigrant parents placed on their children’s academic achievement is reflected in participants’ stories. The following quotes echo their voices.

Parents’ value of education. Helen’s recollection of her experiences demonstrated the profound effect that her parents had in her life:

I had a very good upbringing with my parents. Their focus was on us, and whatever we wanted they would always support. They felt that we should use as many resources in our community to help our children get the best education even if it costs us financially. It’s a supportive education, that’s what my parents were for me. (Interviews #1, p. 5; #2, p. 2)

McLeod reminisced, “As I got older, my mother became more involved and continuously emphasized the importance of doing well in school so that I could go to university and get a job” (Interview #2, p. 2).

Providing life experiences could stimulate the student’s interest and motivation to learn.

My mother believed that an education does not come solely from a classroom, but through your experience in life....Since I was 18 years old, I worked abroad during my summer vacations and the education I received during this time was

invaluable and taught me more than any text book ever could. (McLeod, Interview #2, p. 3)

Sarah referred to her parents as a source of motivation and guidance: “My parents always taught me that education is number one and with that you can do anything you like. They also expect the best for us and as a parent I do the same” (Interview #2, p.2).

Lack of vision or community connections. Although many participants’ parents were concerned with their children’s academic progress, they did not have the vision or the community connections to assist with the fulfillment of their children’s academic dreams. This demonstrates “that some parents led their children to take responsibility for their own learning” (Field notes, 2010). The following quotations were typical responses with respect to the above aspects. “My parents just expected us to go to school. There was no pressure to attend any postsecondary schooling...that was up to us” (Samantha Interview #1, p. 5; Interview #2, p. 2). Lily concurred: “They always encouraged me to pay attention to our studies—but our decision was our decision—whether we decide to quit school, graduate from high school, or proceed onto postsecondary school. I chose the latter.” (Interview #1, p. 5).

Lack of educational expectations. “The meaning that many immigrant parents assigned to education is one dimensional—Going to secondary school was sufficient” (Journal, 2010). Thus, admittedly, not all participants had fond memories of their parents’ support regarding their educational path. Isabella said: “My parents wanted to know what I would achieve for the money I would spend for my education” (Interview #1, p. 4). Accordingly, Vitoria captured the essence of her parents’ absence in her academic life:

I was cared for by babysitters, and when I was of an age to be alone (7–8yrs) I was left to fend for myself. Breakfasts and lunches were my responsibility as well as getting dressed and making my way to school. After school, I was also on my own and was responsible for getting myself to the after-school program: Portuguese School. My parents had no educational expectations. They were content with the basic requirement which was going on to high school. In fact, when I decided to do a graduate degree my mother said, “filha os teus estudos ja chegam”—“daughter your present studies are sufficient.” Basically, my parents’ approach was very hands off, but they were present in my upbringing and played a very important role in the area of discipline. (Interview #2, p. 2)

In short, participants’ parents assigned different meanings to education and/or placed an importance on their children’s educational achievement through different perspectives.

#### *Mothers’ Role and Their Expectations Towards Education*

The fourth theme emerged from participants’ various outlooks in the light of their beliefs with respect to their children’s learning process and their expectations towards education. They also mentioned their spouses’/partners’ role in the process.

Participants were asked what their feeling was about early care of their child was insofar as how it prepares children for kindergarten. McLeod embodied the other participants’ educational prowess: “I try the message that learning is fun” and “if you established that from a very early age you do not make it sound like a job,” then “your children have a different attitude towards learning” (Interview #1, p. 2).



Mothers' Contribution to their Children's Development. To contribute to their children's holistic development, mothers engage in learning activities. The following participants' quotes propose some learning opportunities that enhance their children's education. "We do try and give him learning tools, to colour, to do the alphabet, to build puzzles. He goes to the mall most of the time with me, or grocery shopping. I can develop his social skills, and I guess his confidence" (Samantha, Interview #1, p. 3). Sarah explained: "They are like sponges, and they observe everything that they are learning, so my son knows the basics—how to write his name, how to understand the sound of the letters...and a little bit of social skills, because they are small and they have to interact with kids still...and with time the cognitive skills will come" (Interview #1, p. 2). McLeod similarly indicated:

As a parent it is my responsibility to provide the educational toys for my daughter to play with. I have purchased a lot of things to teach her how to count, how to identify colors, how to recognize the alphabet. So I tried to provide my daughter with those kinds of cognitive developmental materials, tools to explore...because she is at an age where they learn through play, they learn through exploring. You have to give them things where they have to do the thinking. (Interview #1, p. 3)

Additionally, the reference to adaptability as part of children's growth is emphasized by Otie: "They are more able to adapt when they are faced with all kinds of new experiences" (Interview #1, p. 2).

All participants emphasized storytelling, errands, and play activities as scaffolding strategies to enhance their children's education. Literacy engagement and

parental emotional responsiveness are two types of parenting behaviours that influence children's development. Lily synthesises the above in the following statement:

I think the social skills are what help build the cognitive skills at my son's age.

We are constantly reading with him...Portuguese and English literature...we do a lot of talking at home because children learn through modeling and talking. We also do a lot of play activities together...he is 2 years old...and we are trying to give him as many opportunities as possible for learning. (Interview #1, pp. 2-3)

Isabella advocated a structured environment like a day-care as her only choice for the growth and social interaction that children need. She iterated:

My son has blossomed since being in school [day-care] full time....He interacts with other children on a regular basis and has a consistent schedule, they do letters, numbers, geography, they put shapes together, and I have an activity book, he plays on his own. Or we go and see people. He has been exposed to so many things. And he goes with me everywhere. I hope that he does not fall behind and be discouraged later on in life. (Interview #1, p. 1; p. 3)

Education as a priority. Parents' stimulation is the driving force behind children's growth and development. Thus, there is no surprise to note that education was one of parents' main concerns and also one of the most mentioned factors in this study. This issue was explored further during the second interview (see Appendix B, Questions 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Toronto District School Board trustees approved the establishment of a task force that in April 2011 will attempt to tackle the lower graduation rates for students of Portuguese descent. CBC News, Mar 10, 2011, Portuguese Student Task Force Approved - School Board Hopes to Examine Lower Graduation Rates for Students of Portuguese Descent

These participants took into account the role that education could play in their children's lives. The subsequent participants' voices reiterated their beliefs in "our children's education is a priority" (Isabella and Helen, Interview #2, p. 2). Otie elucidated: Early care is "the foundation for further education" (Interview #1, p.2). McLeod also agreed that early education is a means for academic fulfilment. "Toddler/preschool years are the milestones before beginning kindergarten" (Interview #2, p. 2).

When the participants were asked about their preference in regards to day-care programs (i.e., enhanced or regular program), the findings showed that all the participants chose the enhanced program—Scenario A (see Appendix B). They placed a heavy emphasis on a program with a structural quality, focusing on: child-staff ratio/caregivers' preparation and training/extra-curricular activities. Participants placed the least amount of emphasis on the cost. Sarah chose the enhanced program because "smaller classes sizes and the detailed curricular activities are much better if a day-care can offer it" (Interview, #2, p. 1). Samantha epitomized: "[Education] is at the top of our list when it comes to sacrifices" (Interview #2, p. 2).

Mothers' expectations towards their children's education. When participants were asked what their expectations were with respect to their children's education, the ultimate response of all of them was postsecondary completion. "I would expect my child's care and education to be of number one priority and to be of high quality (postsecondary education)" (Isabella, Interview #2, p. 2). Otie concurred: "Both academic (postsecondary completion) and life education are a must, as well as encountering new people, experiencing new places, foods etc. My focus is also

academically and life experience oriented so that my children will grow up to become well-adjusted, productive members of our society” (Interview#2, p. 2). Samantha believed her children should pursue a postsecondary education, but she offered a slightly different perspective regarding academic achievement. She referred to secondary school education as an acceptable level of instruction for her children. She mentioned that “ultimately it will be their choice, and I would consider them educated if they completed secondary schooling” (Interview #2, p. 2).

By and large, in order to obtain educational achievement in the form of a higher education and marketable skills, all participants consider education as a priority and a necessity for their children.

Fathers’ Role and Expectations towards their Children’s Education. Without a doubt, family engagement matters for all children in the early years regardless of the social, cultural, or ethnic group. While the interviews did not involve fathers, their role in raising their children was perceived and interpreted through the participants’ accounts. McLeod made a strong statement that “the earliest lessons in social behaviour are learned in family from both mother and father (Interview #1, pp. 1–2). However, there are social and cultural characterizations of fathers as disengaged players in the childrearing process. When asked whether their spouses/partners were involved in the upbringing of their children, all the participants agreed that it was a “joint endeavour” (Lily, Interview #2, p. 2) and that their spouses/partners had a primary role in their children’s lives. “My husband feels the same way I do as per my answer of ‘we’. We try our best to give our children every opportunity to learn” (Helen, Interview #2, p. 2). Thus, there is evidence

in my study for the increased paternal participation and active involvement in their children's education. Vitoria elucidated:

My husband is involved as much as he can be. Because he works full-time this makes it a little more difficult. However, on weekends and during the evenings we are equally involved...we are equally involved with regards to teaching our children about values, norms, and discipline. My husband is also involved in my son's music program. This is something that we decided that they would do together. (Interview #2, p. 3)

Fathers do engage in child care. They tend to their children, are hands on and participate in their children's daily routines, errands, and so on. The participants think it is fair to split the chores and household responsibilities between themselves and their spouses. "Mommy and daddy both work and both help out as much as possible. I think it is great, as it sends my daughter a clear message that we do not have stereotypical roles in our house" (McLeod, Interview #2, p. 3). Lily explained: "We are a true partnership...our son is both of our responsibility. There is nothing that I do for our son that my husband does not do" (Interview #2, p. 3). Helen reinforced this sentiment by stating that "my husband is completely involved in our children's upbringing as much as I am, in play time, reading, counting, feeding, toilet training, and disciplining" (Interview #2, p. 2).

Although many participants take the initiative to organize and coordinate their children's activities, their spouses/partners participate according to what time allows. Vitoria reinforces this statement by saying, "my husband is involved as much as he can but is limited because he works full-time and I am a stay-home mom."

All participants also perceived that their spouses/partners have placed an emphasis on education and felt that their expectations were the same as theirs. Vitoria summed up her story:

We have educational expectations of our children. We continue to foster a positive learning environment at home and expose them to extracurricular activities. We often talk about the importance of doing well in school and indirectly/casually expose them to the idea of higher education by showing them the schools that we went to and other similar environments and talk to them about what we did when we were there. We have also started an educational fund for them. (Interview #2, p. 2)

In short, taking into account participants' perceptions and comments, their spouse/partners do mother their children through active caregiving and have also moved away from stereotypical gendered roles of parenting style(s).

### *Participants' Interpretation of Success*

The last theme focused on participants' understanding of success. The last question of the second interview was how participants interpreted this (Appendix B). Was success defined by the participants as personal, social, cultural, or spiritual, or was their interpretation something else? What was underlying this open-ended question was "what makes a child successful from their parents' perspectives"? There are many ways that the participants discussed success such as: being passionate about what you do, being a good citizen, it is not all about chasing money, rather it is seizing the opportunity, getting an education, taking risks, and making a difference.

The following quotations elaborate on the above ideas. “I do not believe there is only one category to accurately measure one’s success. It is a combination of different components: occupational achievement, gainful employment, material wealth, academic achievement” (McLeod, Interview #2, p. 3). Helen added that it is “a combination of all these elements (occupational and academic achievement, gainful employment, and material wealth)” because “a child can be very successful academically and do nothing with this” and “can be wealthy and an unhappy person” (Interview #2, p. 3). Isabella, on the other hand, emphasized “academic achievement is associated with gainful employment” (Interview #2, p. 3), thus resulting in the foundation for being upwardly mobile. Vitoria, for example, felt that her parents and teachers questioned whether she could be successful academically. She reflected on her academic experience:

Overall, success must be tailored to the child’s life purpose: “being a good, decent human being” (Otie Interview #2, p. 3), “have a sense of accomplishment” (Daniela, Interview #2, p. 3), “combination of health and being a responsible and caring adult” (Lily, p. 3). Yet, Helen reflects that “there needs to be a balance between occupational and academic achievement with good ethics and morals” (Interview #2, p. 3), and Samantha, Daniela, and Vitoria captured the core of this matter: “children’s happiness” (Interview #2, p. 3).

For most participants, educational attainment is the cornerstone for further education and a prerequisite for children’s success. Sarah epitomized most participants’ remarks regarding the role that academic achievement can play in their children’s lives. “If a child is academically well, they can achieve any form of success, does not matter what they decide to take” (Sarah, Interview #2, p. 2).

In brief, the multidimensionality of success coalesced in all participants' responses when they assigned different or a combination of meanings to it: self-assurance, kindness, compassion to others, a sense of self-accomplishment, being a good citizen, health, academic achievement, and happiness.

### **Summary**

This chapter considers the perspectives of mothers of Portuguese descent living in a large urban centre and across a distinct group of children ages 2 to 3. Children at this age learn social and emotional/cognitive skills. As their emotion is part of their cognition, being in a learning environment this early in age does not necessarily mean that they are being instructed, but they are developing other skills which will later help them with their cognitive development. These participants wanted to expose their children to different kinds of learning, they gave what they considered the best (unconditional love and protection), and they wanted to cover many different "things" to have an open mind. So these mothers would encourage their children to know their past and to support and teach them along the way. They do believe that their children are capable of reaching all these milestones. Throughout these interviews participants found the power of their voices. Some were so eager to explain their points of view and they recognized that their perspectives would contribute to greater awareness of the importance of early education in a child's life. If empowerment results in personal growth, participants can be the voice of authority on their successful efforts to call on their children's inner strength and talents. Their sense of empowerment can change their outlook on life.



This research provides a deeper understanding of how the participants' sociocultural background combined with family relationships and circumstances, interplay to shape Portuguese-Canadian mothers' beliefs and attitudes. Several findings provided information about ways in which a wide range of factors and conditions determined their decisions towards their children's early education and influenced their socioemotional, cognitive, language development—and therefore have impacted their academic accomplishment.

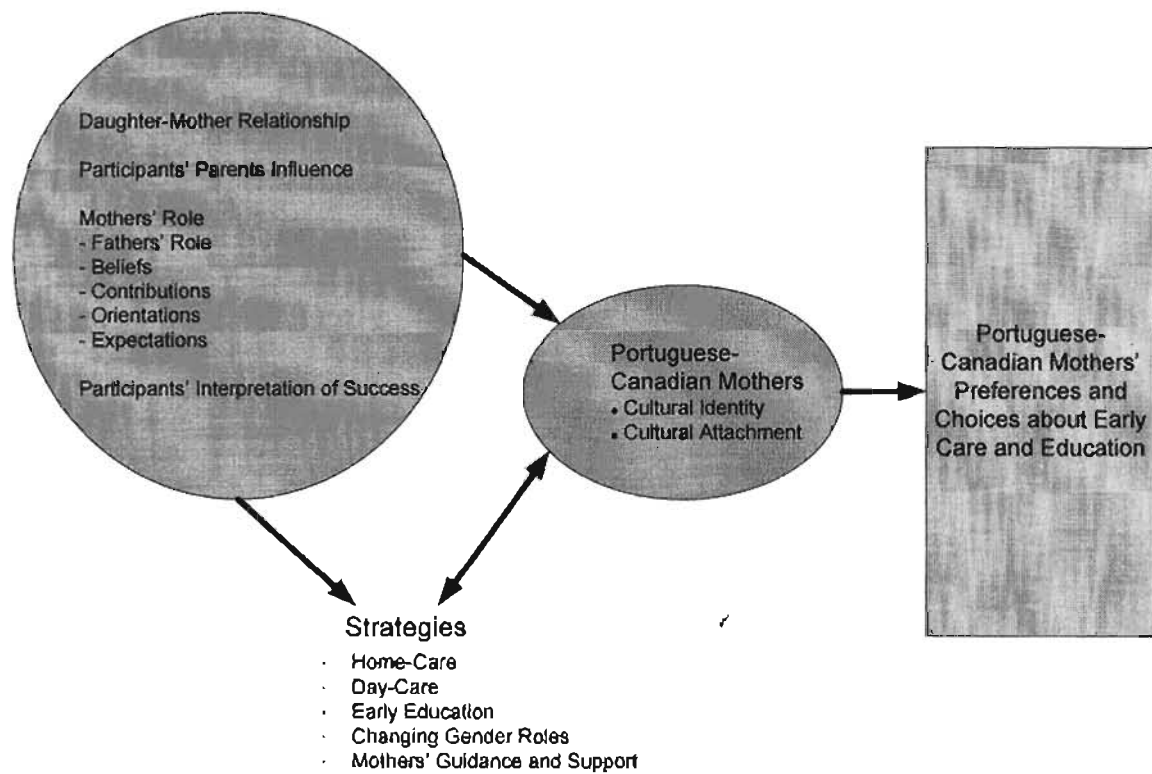
Many of the participants were willing to be involved in this study and enjoyed reflecting on their motherhood and care arrangements. Some of these participants were initially on guard, but then they got involved and responded effortlessly in the interview. All of them wanted their voice/opinion to be heard. Several were very articulate, enthusiastic, and very eagerly involved in the study. Overall, these participants are very proud of their heritage, they praise their mothers, and there is a strong bond between mother and participant. Many participants are very family oriented and place lots of emphasis on the extended family care. Part of the participants' wish is to have their children speaking Portuguese and expose them to the culture of their grandparents. Therefore, the extended family relationship is required so that the language and culture are passed on.

Most participants' parents did not know “how” and that their children could thrive academically in the mainstream Canadian society. However, these participants are engaged in the best kind of pedagogical practices—ones that engage the whole child as a participant in the social life of the family and community. The problem is the way success is defined in school culture and the educational practices and policies in the

school system as well. Considering the above analysis and presentation of the findings, it is interesting to recognize that participants were interested in providing education for their children that their own parents had considered not worthwhile for them. Hence, participants encouraged their children towards a different educational path and assign a purpose to education different than most of their parents.

A visual coding paradigm of mothers' preferences and choices about early care and education (see Figure 16) was generated according to the findings of this study.

Finally, as a researcher, I tried to put slices of reality together, creating a process of psychological and emotional unity. As a pattern of sounds and images blended together in harmony, as a quilt maker (borrowing from Hunt, 2007), I was interested in what discourses mothers grow on to constitute their subjectivity, in addition to how these discourses can influence the women in my study to negotiate their roles as mothers, daughters, spouses/partners, and professionals. In spite of recognizing that all women are different, I did not resist the temptation to pose identical questions to all of them, to obtain a great understanding of how these women manage to juggle demands of bringing up children alongside the conditions they live when they have preferences and make choices regarding their children's lives.



**Figure 16.** Visual coding paradigm of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' preferences and choices about early care and education.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to explore the choices, which consist of many components such as attitudes, values, beliefs, and preferences of Portuguese-Canadian mothers regarding their children's early education and care, in addition, to specifically understand what sociological and psychological conditions led these mothers to make their decisions for early care arrangements. These sociological and psychological conditions consist of many entwined attributes that influence and shape the decision-making process. This chapter is organized in light of the findings from the data in an attempt to answer following two research questions:

1. What decisions do the Portuguese-Canadian mothers make regarding their children's early education and care?
2. Why do Portuguese-Canadian mothers make these choices? In other words, what are the sociological and psychological conditions influencing the mothers regarding early care arrangements?

The first section of this chapter discusses the first question that looked at the core phenomenon and its dimensions. The second section addressed the second question and the themes that emerged. The framework theories were revisited and linked to the research in order to build and support the case that Portuguese-Canadian mothers' choices about early education and care were fundamental in school achievement.

To develop a full understanding of the issue at hand, a review of the noteworthy literature was conducted in Chapter Two. Although a body of literature exists that describes and investigates Portuguese-Canadians in Canada, very little is known about

the Portuguese-Canadian mothers' and their spouses'/partners' decisions regarding early education and care. Furthermore, the literature review either contradicted or supported this study's findings. There were also gaps that needed to be investigated in an effort to understand parental involvement in their children's school life. In the light of Portuguese-Canadian students' underachievement, few qualitative studies have been carried out to explore the importance of education and care from a mother's perspective.

The third section of this chapter explores the implications for a theory that introduces an emerging paradigm for the Portuguese-Canadian community. It was hoped that the study would move towards developing a theory that contributes to understanding why the Portuguese-Canadian mothers make their choices in relation to early education and care and lay a theoretical and empirical basis for future research. In this, it provides an exploration of the issues that need to be addressed and inferences and practices that should be pursued. This chapter concludes with the observations, personal reflections, and recommendations of the researcher.

### **Core Phenomenon**

In relation to the first research question, the core phenomenon that emerged exposed the type of care Portuguese-Canadian mothers preferred for their 2- to 3-year-old children. The three types of care (home-care, day-care and blended-care) that emerged were largely based on their beliefs, personal experiences and circumstances, and family economic constraints. Regardless of the care settings, many variables interplay when participants choose their child care and early education options. These are any of the following: a nurturing and safe environment (love and protection), cultural influence,

family circumstances, economic benefits or constraints, and convenience/practical reasons.

Based on Ruddick's (2007) maternal thinking theory, all decisions entail and encompass a combination of factors that govern a mother's thoughts about her children's protection, growth, and adaptability. What this research found was that, along with Ruddick's thinking, the process of deciding the best type of care is based on the experiences, circumstances, and constraints of the individual family. In regards to type of care selected, these Portuguese-Canadian mothers had a wide array of child care and education options. While home-care (maternal and relative) was the prevalent option, one mother did not concur and preferred to place her child in day-care as a way to stimulate cognitive development and social interaction. Nannies and babysitters were not given any consideration. It is interesting to note that blended-care was used by two mothers, but their option was not as cut and dried as it was perceived. One mother selected home-care and day-care as a mixed approach to expose her child to a structured learning environment on a part-time basis; she appeared to be decisive, and external factors did not impact her decision. However, another mother was confronted by the economic constraints and/or family pressure; she was ambivalent about her decision. My observation was that both nannies and babysitters were somewhat frowned upon. In the end, all of them did what they could and what they thought was best, even though some mothers sometimes displayed some level of guilt, such as one participant who had her mother care for her child even though her preference was day-care.

While extensive amount of literature on the types of care options was reviewed (e.g., Brandon, 2004; Burman, 2008; Dunn, 1981; Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2002; Reynolds,

2005; Winter & Kelley, 2008), it was interesting to see that literature on blended-care appeared to be nonexistent. Is it possible that this form of care will become more prevalent as mothers attempt to balance their beliefs, experiences and circumstances, and financial constraints with their careers and cultural heritage? Regardless, Portuguese-Canadian mothers were thoughtful of their choices with regards to their children's development. Hence, early childhood choices are very personal, and mothers will proceed with what they think is best for their children.

Many of our daily decisions affect children's well-being and development (Schweinhart, 2008). The "mother" is typically perceived as being the natural caregiver, as they are the primary individuals that shape the way their children view the world. Hence mothers' rationales are derived from their own judgments and express the facts and values of their practices. They gained their knowledge through their maternal thinking and practice of raising a family (Ruddick, 2007). These women's theory of mind, their mode of reasoning based on facts and events that occur in everyday situations made them accountable for their children's well-being and growth.

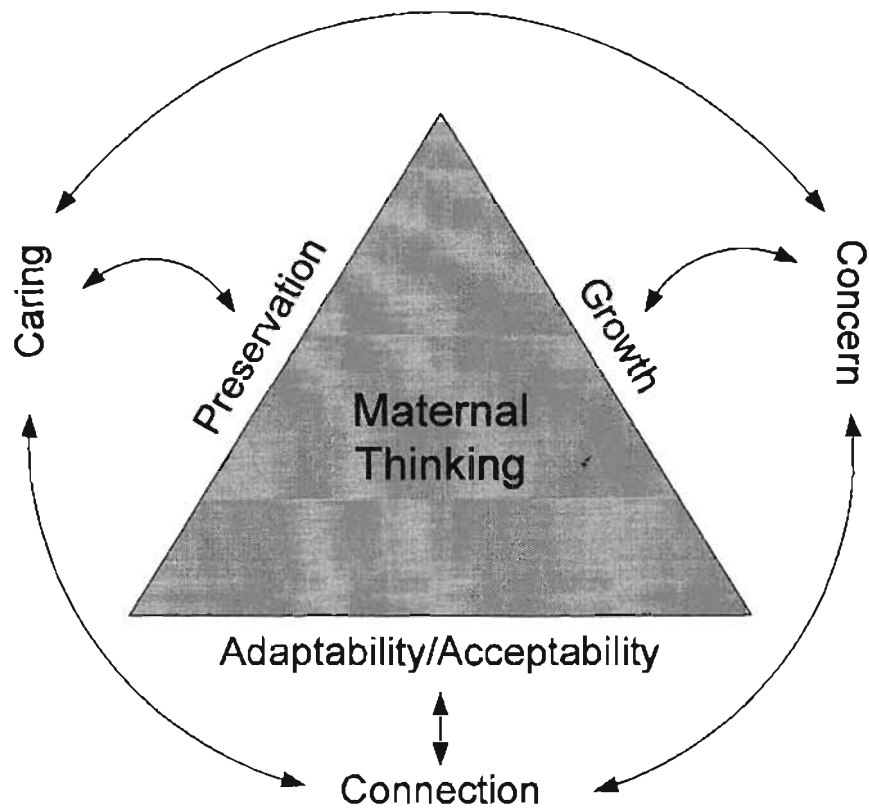
When Portuguese-Canadian women in this research talked about their preferences and choices about care and early education, they made reference to what Martin (1992) refers to as the three Cs—care, concern, and connection. These mothers mentioned a loving environment (caring), responsibility for their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (concern) and a need for life preparedness (connectedness). The three Cs represented the mother's knowledge and functioned as a guide to educate and care for their children. These three dynamic preoccupations coalesced with Ruddick's (2007) three demands that govern mothers' thought: preservation—protecting the life of

a child, growth-fostering development, and adaptability/acceptability—shaping a cheerful child. Figure 17 illustrates maternal thinking in mothers' mind-mindedness and how it integrates the three Cs and Ruddick's theory explaining mothers' practices and views about childrearing. All of this contribute to the physical, emotional and intellectual growth of a child. This demonstrates that mothers were their children's anchor and liaison to the world. Hence, I feel that the mothers' role is to educate their children to accept and be accepted in society.

The analysis of interview data showed that home-care (maternal and relative) and day-care were the prevalent options among the Portuguese-Canadian mothers in this study. Such findings greatly correspond to the dichotomy between day-care and home-care in the reviewed literature. The reasons the participants appreciated early care and education in their children's development, whether in a home-care or day-care setting, can be seen in the following discussion. Literature has demonstrated that day-care centers are the best learning environment to stimulate children with a structured cognition-base on early education programs which enable children to better perform sociocognitively in public schools (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Winter & Kelley, 2008). Nevertheless, some studies offer a different point of view, claiming that programs with cognitive-oriented curriculum can be detrimental to children's social and emotional development (Blok et al., 2005; Elkind, 1986) or have insignificant impact on development outcomes (only motor and social; Lefebvre & Merrigan (2002). It is interesting to note that some literature argues for the importance of day-care for children of immigrants in facilitating academic success (Brandon, 2004; Magnusson et al., 2006). However, Bernhard (1995) found that



## Maternal Thinking Role of Mothers



**Figure 17. Mothers' mind-mindedness.**

children can develop in early childhood education programs regardless their ethnicity and culture.

Another body of research argues strongly for the social, emotional, and cognitive advantages of keeping the children in a home-care setting during their early years unless there is an important developmental delay (e.g., N. Dunn, 1981; Moore & Moore, 1990; Seefeldt, 1990). In order to address attachment figures in children's development, one clear position of the attachment theory (J. Bowlby, 1999) is that the mother is at the top of primary child care despite the multitude of bonds with significant others (Neubauer, 1985; Rutter, 1981). Hence, regarding the use of maternal care's contribution to the growth of competency in children, findings disclosed that "mothers' utilization of experiences that naturally occur in their everyday environment in a context of moment to moment" interactions (Dunn, p. 246) is paramount to build children's confidence, self-esteem and cognitive readiness. That is, maternal-care and teaching is of an informal nature as the foundation for academic skills tend to be taught informally to children before kindergarten. The literature also shows that the cultural norm that children should be cared for exclusively by the mothers is still powerful, indicating even if this means putting their careers on hold (Leach, 1997). Such a tendency seems to be reinforced by the present study. Some participants preferred to be stay-home moms and care for their children rather than pursue their careers. Those that choose to do this had the economic means or made a conscious effort to adjust their lifestyle to allow this to happen.

Another perspective offered by Wheelock and Jones (2002) and Noivo (1997) and complemented by this research was that parents who work or have changing employment schedules and/or family economic circumstances tend to choose care for

their children from grandparents and other relatives. Drawing from participants' responses, there was heavy dependence on extended family to care for children. Some participants valued the extended family option for a sense of nurturing, protection, trust, and teachings, while others used this option because of their economic constraints or to financially assist a family member. It is worth noting that participants' points of view were aligned with Noivo's study on Portuguese-Canadians in Canada which discussed how extended family care (mainly by the grandparents) was always a child care option for Portuguese families.

Moreover, both the findings of this study and the literature (Bronfenbrenner, 2004; Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2004) noted that the quality and type of care children received are very critical and influences their behaviour and development.

### **Dimensions**

Mothers' outlook about child care and early education were categorized by five dimensions that took into account the participants' responses regarding their preferences/choices. Their preferences varied as their beliefs, experiences, circumstances and constraints differed. The two tenets that unfolded demonstrated that some mothers aligned their decisions with their choices while others due to economic constraints and/or practical reasons lacked the match between their preferences and choices.

#### *Match and Mismatch between Preferences and Choices*

Two of the dimensions outlined illustrated that participant preferences and choices were either a match or mismatch. Considering the type of care selected, the majority of the participants in this study did not hesitate to indicate that their choices matched their personal beliefs and preferences. That is, they chose the type of care that

they deemed the best and the most appropriate for the social, emotional, and cognitive development of their children.

However, others felt that they would rather choose another type of care if they had the option. Due to their personal and economic circumstances they had to rely on home-care (relative care) as their choice. Otherwise they would have chosen home-care (maternal care) and/or day-care.

It is interesting to note that two profiles of parental orientations emerged in this study: “mothers as mediators,” those who believed that taking an active role in teaching their children at home would provide opportunity for them to gain knowledge and morals and “conventional mothers,” those who believed that day-cares are the best settings to provide their children with instructional tools for their academic achievement.

#### *Determinants of Preferences and Choices*

This dimension, in light of the findings of this study, helps Portuguese-Canadian mothers be aware of the many variables that interplay when they choose child care and early education arrangements. These are any of the following: socioeconomic circumstances, child’s age, community resources, and cultural influence(s). (Note: A detailed discussion about cultural influences is presented below as a separate dimension.)

Socioeconomic status. Many studies have examined mothers’ child care choices based on their extrinsic characteristics such as affordability or intrinsic factors including structural day- care characteristics (qualifications, child ratios, and administration; e.g., Leibowitz & Waite, 1996). The findings of this study confirmed the above research. As a result, some participants, due to their socioeconomic conditions, could choose to be stay-home moms or pursue their careers and afford day-care. These Portuguese-Canadian

mothers' decisions are determined by their personal and family circumstances. This dimension became an apparent factor in Portuguese-Canadian mothers' perceived ideals for child care. However, Glass (1998) remarks that high rate of care by relatives may reflect parental preferences, employment schedules, and financial constraints. Indeed, some participants, due to their economic constraints, had to choose home-care (relative care) as their only alternative. Hence, there was a disjuncture between those mothers' beliefs and their type of care arrangements.

It is worth noting that the literature alluded to maternal choices and options about care and early education to be influenced by the mothers' educational and professional status. The literature showed that mothers with higher levels of education and career orientation were likely to select a day-care (Datcher-Loury, 1988; Houston, 2003). Interestingly, the findings of this study did not support these conclusions because, regardless of the educational attainment of the participants (elementary, secondary, or postsecondary), their decisions in regards to type of care varied mostly based on their beliefs. It cannot be said that with this sample of mothers, those with higher education/careers selected professional care. This is where the cultural element may have come into play. Little research has been carried out to investigate the relationships between ethnicity and child care choice. However, it is also interesting to note that available studies—all from the United States suggest that minority mothers are more likely to choose informal care while mainstream mothers tend to choose regulated day-care (Atkinson, 1997; Seo, 2003). As the literature reviewed did not provide comparable information for Canada, these kinds of conclusions cannot be substantiated completely.

Child's age. Another determinant in choosing a form of care is the child's age. There is agreement in the theoretical literature that the options of care altered depending on the child's age, leading those with children older than 3 years of age to select day-care (Mason & Kuhlthau, 1989; Rutter, 1985). Surprisingly, many of the mothers in this study revealed that they would change their preferences after their children turned 2 and half or 3 years of age. So while they preferred home-care in the child's initial stages of life, their choices (day-care or blended-care) would change when the child was older.

Community child care resources. This aspect was apparent and at times appeared more utile than what was suggested during the interviews. Several mothers made reference to how they often obtained information about child care through these resources and how there was so much information available at their disposal. For many, regardless of the type of care selected, it was a source of reference and an opportunity to network and make new contacts. It was very impressive to notice the mothers' capability to make sense of the immense amount of information and to utilize it as a form of self-help. Once again, in all the literature reviewed, this finding was not apparent.

### *Mothers' Parenting Orientations*

Participants' attitudes were very cohesive and supportive towards their children's education. Although Portuguese-Canadian mothers' concerns about their children's safety were overriding in the decisions made, they were very conscious about their parenting orientations.

The reviewed literature focused a great deal on the importance of early education as the foundation to scholastic achievement (Astington, 1998; Winter & Kelley, 2008; Zajonc, 1980). Findings in this study revealed the importance of the social, cognitive, and

emotional development in the child's school attainment. All participants believed that social-cognitive behaviour is decisive to children's socialization. Hence, they engaged in their children's socialization and development and stressed the importance of learning opportunities on a daily basis. It is interesting to note that only one participant referred specifically to the emotional development of her child as a foundation for future achievement. Most of them emphasized the importance of learning Portuguese as a bridge to maintaining their cultural heritage and as a means of empowerment. They did not recognize the mere fact that exposure to the home language was fundamental in the development of their child's linguistic skills in the English language. Cummins (1991) and other researchers have documented the significance of learning the home language as the foundation to catch up academically. Portuguese-Canadian mothers referred to the importance of play and participation in the mothers' routines as a way for children to develop their social and cognitive self. Engaging in play stimulated emotions such as empathy, altruism, and fear and developed children's social competence (Hunt, 2007). As per Hunt, guiding and teaching their children to perceive their social world, Portuguese-Canadian mothers constructed their children's psychosocial self. Some reviewed literature indicates that care is the most substantial characteristic of mothering (N. Dunn, 1981; Ruddick, 2007). The present findings confirm this but explored it in more depth. Participants referred to "care" as being more than tending to their children's basic needs. "Care" based on Portuguese-Canadian mothers' scripts, embraces caring about the child and caring about child learning. This notion overlaps the finding from Burman's (2008) research that points out "care" as a means of education. All of the

mothers were aware of the impact of their decisions and choices on their children's future in the longterm and celebrated early learning as the foundation to academic achievement.

### *Mothers' Cultural Beliefs*

The last dimension exposed the importance of family ties and the participants' cultural heritage. The literature outlines a clear concept of cultural identity as a frame of reference: the sense of shared values and attitudes, the language, and feelings of commitment and belonging (White & Burke, 1987).

My findings revealed the significance of family as a re(source) for maintaining cultural heritage and attachment via the Portuguese language. Portuguese-Canadian mothers wanted to keep the family cultural heritage intact. This was often accomplished indirectly through home-care (maternal and relative care). Other venues such as cultural festivities, family celebrations, and vacations to Portugal were forms of cultural retention. The reviewed literature has demonstrated that the need to retain the cultural heritage is the rationale for not being completely assimilated, and it is a positive value for immigrants (Noivo, 2000; Oliveira, 2009). The Portuguese-Canadian mothers' willingness to maintain family ties and cultural roots through the use of home language as the basis to develop a love and respect for their cultural identity is dramatically important. It is the anchor of their child's individuality and an empowering strategy toward school achievement. Moreover, there is general agreement in the theoretical literature that participants' priorities and cultural motivation underlie the way they interpreted their own cultural values and articulated their goals as parents (Phinney, 1990). Drawn from the essence of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' accounts, their ideas



about child care are shaped by their own upbringing, by their life experiences, and family circumstances.

### **Themes**

In this first section, participants' choices and decisions were based on their personal and family circumstances along with their cultural and socioeconomic conditions that pervaded their lives.

Based on the second research question restated early on in the chapter, this discussion is divided into two parts. In the first part, the five themes considered as the most important are discussed:

- Mothers' identity and cultural attachment
- Daughter-mother relationship
- Participants' parents and their expectations towards education
- Mothers' role and expectations towards education
- Participants' interpretation of success.

In the second part, I revisit the theories which built the case that Portuguese-Canadian mothers' decisions about early education are very important for school achievement. (This chapter is narrated in the present tense as it is a current discussion.)

#### *Mothers' Identity and Cultural Attachment*

"Identity remains central to our sense of selfhood and community - from family to clan to ethnic group to nation" (Fagundes & Blayer, 2007) in *Oral and Written Narratives and Cultural Identity*.

This theme developed as I was captivated by the power of participants' responses regarding their identity and cultural attachment. Hence, I thought it was important, as a

Portuguese-Canadian to open a “dialogue” on the subject of cultural and ethnic identity and its significance to intergenerational familial relationships. Our perspective is impacted by time, place, and culture.

**Identity.** When the Portuguese-Canadian mothers of this study were asked to speak about their identity, they spoke from their own experiences. Participants brought light to their ancestry (i.e., their shared culture and common historical repertoires) through responses which connect them specifically with their past heritage and present culture. I drew from Erikson’s (1968) theory of ego identity formation that places identity at the core of individual and also in the core of her/his common culture. In this study I use culture and ethnicity interchangeably. It appears to be something everyone feels - the importance of achieving a commitment to their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1989).

Findings in this study revealed two fundamental rudiments of a cultural identification. For all these Portuguese-Canadian mothers their “Portugueseness” and “Canadianness” were the anchors of their individuality. This oneness underlying the more superficial differences is the collective one true self—the essence of these mothers’ identification: their “Portugueseness” (Gomes, 2008) and “Canadianness” (Morgado, 2009), the two presences of their identity. As Phinney (1990) argues, a strong ethnic identity does not necessarily imply a weak relationship or low involvement with the dominant culture. It is cultural attachment, the person’s basic identity formed during the earliest periods of socialization, that strengthens the person’s self-esteem.

**Attachment.** Mothers’ culturalism shaped their lives and made them merge into their selfhood and attached emotional significance to their group identity. Aguiar (2001) notes that the Portuguese in Canada experience a form of “racial middleness” or as he

further explains per his experience as a student how immigrant status functions in the educational experience of students and how it implies a neutrality of identity (cited in Morgado, 2009, p.71). This was largely attributed to the very harsh conditions within the Portuguese community and the difficulties that some students endured as a result of the immigration process. Interestingly, participants did not identify with any stereotypes of inferiority and job ghettoization mentioned in Aguiar's study. They were proud of their cultural roots, and they did not feel marginalized as Portuguese descendants. Participants clung to their culture, immersing in both Portuguese and Canadian identities. They were culturally attached, preserving their cultural traditions, values, and beliefs, which can be perceived as the core to an individual's source of identity. They also acknowledged and praised their Canadian affiliation. Their sense of belonging was grass rooted in the Portuguese surroundings that determined what they were: the language, customs, values, and beliefs from the world into which they were born. There is a reconciliation of their past and their present in the interplay of their acculturation and their ethnic retention (Oliveira & Teixeira, 2004). As a result, there was no doubt that these Portuguese-Canadian mothers had not stagnated but rather evolved and developed beyond parameters of their primary ethnic identity.

Some of the literature portrays the Portuguese-Canadians as having a hyphenated identity (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), being bicultural (Nunes, 1986), dissociated identity (Morgado, 2009), or being stuck in a limbo (Trindade, 2007). However, my findings are more in line with the research of Teixeira and Da Rosa (2009), who emphasized that Portuguese Canadians are on a continuum of adaptations being in a cross-cultural intersectionality. As a result, my perception of the participants' accounts was that they

broke through the boundaries beyond the immobility of their community and leaped forward into a new space of multiple seedlings that was their shared Canadianness. They created a third space of growth where there was a continuous renewal of their cultural *métissage*, or what can be referred to as hybridization. This notion overlaps the finding of Cuccioletta's (2003) research which demonstrated that two individual phases of past and present that occur simultaneously is a hybrid process of cultural *métissage* that is the core of transculturalism.

### *Daughter–Mother Relationship*

“Our mothers and grandmothers...moving to music not yet written” (A. Walker, 2007) ‘Search of our Mothers’ Gardens’.

In the light of the findings of this study, participants praised their mothers, and for most there was a strong bond as they were inspirational in their lives. The participants’ mothers were the influential and guiding force that was instrumental in passing on values and mothering beliefs. When this theme emerged, I was touched and surprised by the vigour that the participants associated with their bond and relationship. It was apparent in their script that there was no difficulty expressing this bond and pride regardless of the participants’ life experiences and hardships.

In Noivo’s (1997) study on Portuguese-Canadian families, the immigrant women who even minimally tended to question traditional gender roles encountered resistance not only from their husbands but also from their mothers. My findings contradict this, as per the discussion on the fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives and the participants’ mothers as prominent figures. Thus, these participants did not appear to reinforce these gender roles as per Noivo’s study. This means that the mother–daughter

relationship was one of reinforcing goals and dreams and not being subjected to gender inequalities. In addition, while some participants recognized that their mothers did not have the developmental knowledge, most of their accounts revealed how this did not matter and that their mothers were still influential. The participants showed affection, appreciation and recognition for the influence that their mothers had in their lives.

These observations are more aligned with Chodorow's (1999) depiction of female identity that is interactive with their mothers. Chodorow argues that the lack of defined ego boundaries between mother and daughter leads to "the reproduction of motherhood"—women's continuing desire to instil maternal capacities.

Adrienne Rich (2007) in "Of Woman Born" emphasized that "motherhood does not come by instinct"; it is a rite of passage along a continuum from pregnancy to childbirth; childbirth to childhood; and childhood to adulthood. Every mother is also a daughter in the perpetual cycle of creation and that was apparent in this research.

#### *Participants' Parents and their Expectations towards Education*

While some of the current literature shows that the Portuguese parents value education (Januário, 2003; Nunes, 1998, 2008; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2009) and that some of them encouraged their children to proceed with postsecondary education (Morgado, 2009). Other researchers such as Noivo (1997) found that many Portuguese immigrants focused only on having their children finish secondary school, which would result in reasonable financial and occupational success. Fonseca (2010) notes that Portuguese parents' lack of fluency in English was a factor in Portuguese students' early school leaving. In addition, demanding jobs and economic strains were their immigrant reality (Nunes, 1998). Aguiar (2001) takes this further and notes that one of the most important

values in Portuguese immigrants' lives was the appreciation of hard work that was the measure of success and the basis of self-esteem (cited in Morgado, 2009).

The question that appeared unanswered in all this literature was that parents value education, but what kind of education? My analysis showed that while most of these immigrants placed an importance on education, they viewed education through three different perspectives, and the participants chose different paths. These were:

1. Parents who emphasized education: These participants pursued an education and feel this is the best legacy that they could have been given, which they will pass on to their children.
2. Parents who did not emphasize education: These participants chose to get an education and stress schooling to the children.
3. Parents who did not emphasize education but gave their children a choice: These participants chose to pursue an education and stress that they will offer the choice to their children.

Participants said that their parents wanted the best for them, but some did not emphasize academic preparation that would likely result in a career. In this study, there was an interesting observation with two siblings who were given a choice but both took different paths educationally. It is obvious that these parents faced a much more challenging experience adapting to life in Canada. Barriers that were important components in their inability to help their children with their schooling included their cultural background, demanding lifestyles required to support their families, and no time to spare to develop a vision for the future. They had to value hard work in order to raise their families and to have a life. For them, school was a rite of passage for their children

in order to get a job, rather than an investment. In other words, the lack of educational linkage between secondary school and postsecondary admission was detrimental for students' academic achievement. In conclusion, many of these participants' parents did not have the idea of education from a broad perspective and lacked the meaning of what is described in Latin as "educare."

#### *Mothers' Role and Expectations towards Education*

We know from the literature that from the early years, children embark on a learning adventure and develop a keen cognizance of their individual awareness (Burman, 2008). Furthermore, family interaction matters for all children in the early years regardless of social, cultural, or ethnic group. Therefore, I was curious to further explore this theme and how parenting behaviours would contribute to the development of children for school readiness.

Participants proclaimed various outlooks in the light of their beliefs with respect to their children's learning process and their expectations towards education. Participants moved away from their immigrant parents' beliefs regarding early care and education. These Portuguese-Canadian mothers emphasized learning opportunities to enhance their children's education (N. Dunn, 1981). Mothers read books, shared stories and did many hands-on activities with their children. This was a significant finding, given that these activities are considered indicators of language and literacy engagement—two important behaviours related to children's developmental outcomes (O'Neill & Shultz, 2007). Furthermore, these parenting behaviours are important behaviours that influence development for all children across cultural, social, and ethnic groups.

It was also apparent that some mothers in this study felt that it was important for their children to attend some form of professional care in the year before they started school. Another finding was that the majority of the mothers, regardless of their academic achievement, expected postsecondary completion for their children, unlike the participants' parents, who wanted their children to obtain an education that was better than theirs and make a decent living. It is not surprising that, like most Canadian parents, these mothers wanted to invest in their children's education so that they could remain competitive in the mainstream society regardless of cost.

The most important contribution of this theme is the value the mothers placed on early education and care and their ability to transmit their inspiration to their children. They were fostering the message that their children were capable of achieving anything they wanted, as other children in Canada. Throughout the interviews and after my analysis of the data (memos, notes, and journal), I felt the passion that was projected through these participants' voices about the lack of academic achievement within the Portuguese community. My interpretation was that they were unwilling to accept the stereotypical illiterate image of their community, as many of the participants and their friends have gone beyond secondary school education. They have also entered the realm of professional environments and want their children to be exposed to this. They did not identify with this image and questioned the statistical evidence of underachievement for both the second and third Portuguese-Canadian generations that were perceived as being immersed into the Canadian mainstream. They were also determined to make a difference and ensure that their children's accomplishments will be the best legacy for the Portuguese community's history in Canada.



Motivation to achieve is shaped by one's parents and is thus cognitive/emotional in nature (Hunt, 2007). Therefore, motivation is the link between participants' expectations and their own engagement in their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Their stimulation is the driving force behind their children's growth and development. Thus, participants' expectations entailed education as their main concern. They took into account the role that academic achievement could play in their children's lives. It is hoped that these Portuguese-Canadian mothers' higher expectations will result in greater attainment from their children.

*Fathers' Role and Expectations towards their Children's Education.* Pinzon and Perez (2000) noted that the male is the dominant, primary decision-maker figure and the hardworking protector in the family according to parenting relationships. Noivo (1997) noted that immigrant Portuguese fathers did not become involved in their children's education. They usually deferred their children's care and education to their mothers and had secondary roles in their children's care and education. There is evidence in my study of the increased paternal participation in their children's care. When asked whether their spouses/partners were involved in the upbringing of their children, all the participants agreed that it was a joint endeavour and that their spouses/partners had a primary role in their children's lives. Fathers did engage in child care and were actively involved in their children's education by reading stories and doing manipulatives. All the participants also perceived that their husbands have placed an emphasis on education and have high expectations towards their children's success and academic achievement.

It was my observation that context also influences how fathers acquire their parenting skills and helps to explain their commitment to childrearing and family

obligations. Although many of the mothers take the initiative to organize their children's activities, and their spouses participate according to what time allows, these fathers do "mother" their children through active care. Taking into account the participants' perceptions and comments, these fathers had also moved away from their own upbringing, where their mothers were the primary caregivers. Therefore, the participants give "voice" to what Ruddick (2007) found as the most innovative change in the institution of motherhood—"the assimilation of men into child care."

#### *Participants' Interpretation of Success*

Success emerged as yet another theme explored under the idea of parents' expectations towards their children's future life. What was underlying this open-ended question was "what makes a child successful from their parents' perspectives?" I grappled with the definition of success due to its multidimensionality as well as the subjectivity of measuring it. Furthermore, the system categorizes people's success and failure in very narrow and oppositional terms as "able" and "unable" and measures self-worth by occupational achievement—where quite often capitalism and power issues along with spiritual values are intertwined. Different societal expectations of what is appropriate for the various stages of child development increase the challenges of parenting in society (the idea of success).

Participants defined personal, social, and cultural success in many ways. The multidimensionality of success coalesced in all participants' responses and they assigned different or a combination of meanings to it. This included self-assurance, kindness, compassion to others, sense of self-accomplishment, being a good citizen, health, academic achievement, and happiness. Overall, the message was that success must be tailored to the child's life purpose. I would define success as "one's frame of mind," that

is, what you think is best for your children, and “an attitude towards life,” the equation that drives success.

Your self-image and your sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and hard work can play a major role in how you approach tasks, challenges, and goals. Schooling and education are the instrumental tools to achieve it. Some participants felt that their parents and teachers questioned their ability to succeed more challenging secondary school programs, which is aligned with McLaren’s (1986) study. These participants’ academic trajectory epitomizes what has happened to many young children in the Portuguese community. As Aguiar (2001) mentioned, one of the most important values of the Portuguese immigrants’ life was their appreciation of work (cited in Morgado, 2009) that was their measure of success and basis of their self-esteem. This value of hard work was passed on to these participants, and they have been able to reinterpret this not as a financial finality but as a base to move forward. Most of these mothers transposed value of hard work into an education that in turn provided them with the same monetary finality as well as social mobility without having the hardships endured by their parents. Taking this a step further and learning from their own experience, most participants do not question their children’s ability to become successful. Regardless, mothers have to enable their children to negotiate the system along the narrow line of success and failure while keeping in mind the goals that their children may be able to achieve.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study offered implications for theory, practice, and future research. The purpose of this section is to emphasize or highlight new areas that have not

been discussed in the existing literature. The intention is that these new areas may act as a springboard for future research.

### *Implications for Theory*

As per my earlier discussions, maternal thinking and all the other theories cannot exist in isolation. As this study has shown, existing theories can be modified to tailor to the population at hand and can build the framework for investigation regarding a specific topic. Purposely, I choose these theories to highlight contributions that have proved useful in understanding how children's development is shaped by their social and cultural contexts. My rationale came from the theoretical and empirical work of these theorists who agreed that the social and/or cultural world plays a primary role in children's development.

For Piaget (1975) and Vygotsky (1978), early childhood is a crucial site for intervention as the context of children's lives impacts on their development. Their work on child development has been one of the important stimulants to much of the current research on infancy. Bronfenbrenner (2004) reiterated that the social, cultural, and physical environments in their reciprocal transactions actively influence the child. Furthermore, all infants form emotional bonds with their caregivers, and the biological purpose of attachment enables children to feel secure when exploring their environments. Bowlby's and Ainsworth's (1991) theories advanced this line of thinking and postulated that the role of attachment in a child's emotional and social development is intrinsically knitted into child development. Last, "play" is a means of cognition in early childhood. Children are viewed as needing to engage with manipulatives in order to support their learning while talking with their peers and adults. In keeping with the literature, how

children come to understand the social and psychological world, known as children's "theory of mind", has become increasingly concerned with the influence of social interaction. That means the co-operative interactions between the child and his/her social world and the type and quality of care which is provided are also implicated in the growth of social understanding.

All this was the frame of reference to which these mothers subscribed and which had a strong role in their children's development. These mothers, without any prescriptive formula, were contributing and reinforcing their beliefs in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of their children. This in turn impacted their children's early care and education and hopefully their future attitude towards education. In addition, their cultural identity cannot be ignored as a component and a motivating factor in helping them decide the type of care preferred for their children. My conclusion is that this journey was a progression along a continuum with a strong foundation from the beginning. This foundation was early education and care. As stated previously, early care and education was one dimension of Portuguese-Canadian mothers' outlook about child care. These mothers complied with Burman's (2008) approach of "care" which she describes as "education" that begins at birth through the child's exploration of his/her world through his/her senses.

### *Implications for Practice*

One important aim of this study was to explore the different dimensions of caregiving and the role that the caregiver can play in a child's development. The knowledge gained showed that effective instruction, whether through curriculum,

activities, chores, or the child's environment, had to be appropriate and sensitive to the biological, social, and cultural circumstances of the children.

Quality care/instruction leads to development, whether it is offered in a home-care, day-care, or blended-care surrounding. These are three acceptable forms of caregiving and this research has shown that no one is perceived to be better than the others. The emphasis here is that the caregiving environment needs to be one of quality and able to lead a child from his current skill level to his potential. Development is furthered by effective instruction that influences the growth of cognitive functions in all individuals.

My perception prior to this research was that children can learn better in an environment that is structured and staffed by professionals. I further felt that this was likely the impetus to a successful academic beginning. However, this research showed that this was not necessarily the case. Different variables interplayed, such as the child's age, environment, circumstances, and the quality of care. Regardless of the three environments, the above variables helped to form the child's social and cognitive self. Furthermore, the literature showed that children of 2 to 3 years of age learn better through direct encounters than through formalized inculcation of symbolic rules. They learn at their own pace, in a much broader context, and tend to learn better by thinking about what they have just learned and to answer their favourite question "why." These three caregiving environments can accommodate this learning process, but regardless of the setting there is a need for the child to feel emotion in order to develop as a socially competent human being.

The findings from this study suggested the need to support the use of literacy and language activities in the home, regardless of whether family members speak in English or Portuguese. Portuguese-Canadian parents need to perceive and promote that home-care (maternal and/or relative) plays a vital role and may be a primary support in facilitating learning activities and cultural development. In conclusion, a child's upbringing is a cultural act that involves childrearing practices, different parenting styles, a wide range of educational methods, and many challenges. Henceforth, home-care, day-care, or blended-care can assist in childrearing. The child will thrive as long as there is quality with respect to both the emotional and cultural responsiveness and an awareness of the child's developmental needs.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

Due to the lack of empirical research and studies available on the specific issue of early education for Portuguese-Canadian children, it was important to investigate the mothers' orientations and decisions towards their children's early care and education. This study contributed to our awareness of the underlying reasons behind Portuguese-Canadian mothers' decisions for their children's care arrangements for children of ages 2 to 3 in Metropolitan Toronto. These findings may be used to understand the different dimensions that impact decisions and help predict future trends for the purpose of early intervention.

Future research should focus on whether academic achievement/success and financial status have anything to do with changing mothers' perspectives on their children's education. My sample was limited, but my assumption was that the mothers' emphasis on early care and education will impact the next generation's educational

stereotypical image. As per the findings of my research, recent statistics of secondary school graduation rates, and my observations in the community, I am hopeful and foresee that the upcoming generations will show improvements in educational outcomes. In addition, it will be interesting to see how the pattern evident in these Portuguese-Canadian mothers' emphasis on care and education and their high expectation towards education will spread and become a trend and part of the new fabric of the Portuguese-Canadian community.

Various researchers (Giles, 2002; Nunes, 2004) have indicated that there is a need for more research to comprehend the manner in which Portuguese-Canadians as an ethnocultural group regard themselves, their families, their community, and their present situation relative to other ethnocultural and racial minorities in Canada. I believe that we need to take this a step forward to see if the difficulties that the Portuguese community experienced in the past were the result of the segregation of earlier generations (namely the first and second). Thus, research on future generations' educational attainment would be instrumental in determining whether or not there is a need to focus on the educational system and how it addresses the needs of ethno-cultural groups.

As seen in this study, culture, heritage, family relationships, and circumstances are instrumental in maternal thinking. There are several studies that call for ethno-specific research and diversity dialogue. I agree and argue that once again this should be taken a step further to explore and understand cross-cultural dimensions and their influence on mothers' preferences and choices. As this research demonstrated, different dimensions can have an impact on the decisions made, and it is important to understand these before jumping to conclusions or making generalizations about a particular culture.



There is a lack of comprehensive information in this respect. This is vital in order to provide the best services to the children and their families. There is a need for a better understanding of children's home life and parental expectations experienced by immigrant families who juggle the culture of their family with the Canadian culture outside their homes.

### **What I Learned and Reflected**

I grappled with the slippery aspect of what has been called diversity, hyphenation, biculturalism, transculturalism, and hybridization. I referred to this new space of cultural fluidity as “Portuguese-Canadianess,” where Portuguese-Canadians recognize themselves as Canadians and redefine the boundaries of their Portuguese community. Thus, this revealed new social and cultural experiences and equal educational opportunities for the Portuguese-Canadians in Canada. This transculturalism enables these mothers to function and create roots and grow and flourish through a process of *métissage* with the surrounding society. I used the term cultural *métissage* (‘*mestiço*’ in Portuguese) because cultures are shaped by continual interactions, merging and converging, promoting the oneness, emphasizing the individual relationships, while respecting diversity. The interchangeable words of hybridization, cultural *métissage*, disequilibrium, or conflict are part of the process that roots the individuals to function within their two cultures—the original and the mainstream. Therefore, cultural hybridization (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1993) is a process of enmeshment of cultural, historical, and economic forces visible globally (Cuccioletta, 2003). It is a cultural phenomenon that believes all cultures are inherently mixed and not only between points. Despite the fact that throughout this study I referred to Portuguese-Canadian mothers with the use of a hyphen “-”, it is apparent that

these mothers are not hyphenated; rather there is a one self underlying their identity. Therefore, I would propose that these mothers be considered Portuguese Canadian rather than Portuguese-Canadian.

From what I heard through these mothers' voices, the accounts of their lives, their memories, I observed that their cultural consciousness brings about transformations in their discourse as immigrant descendant women and creates an autonomous identity between cultural fissure and cultural fusion of the transcultural crossroads of their Canadianness.

Jill Conway (1998), a pioneer in the new history of women in the USA, stresses the importance of the urgent questions of identity and relations to parents in the last decade of 20th century. Conway called the "cultivation of voice," the power of speaking for oneself; having found our voice, we can ask ourselves questions about life in the present. The mothers in this study were encouraged to tell their own stories from their unique perspective. They give a "voice" to their beliefs, values, and opinions. Participants' quotes were used to provide a "voice" to capture feelings, emotion, and experiences. The way I captured these mothers' accounts was by creating an understanding about their differences in a manner that there would be acknowledgement and honour of their life experiences. I tried to present these "voices" as fully and carefully as possible.

Development will happen from "within," and children will learn how to cultivate the vast areas of their potential at every ability level. This is the best way to give meaning to the original Latin word "educare" which is "to draw forth from within." Thus, the students can develop their self-esteem and self-efficacy in their learning

process and become productive members of society. Many new jobs in Ontario will require postsecondary experiences. In this study, all the participants' high expectations towards education reinforced my beliefs that their children will have the opportunity for further school achievement and will be able to meet these new career challenges without any difficulties. As per Brown's (2010) report, it was encouraging to see that the graduation rate of Portuguese secondary students had steadily increased. My expectation is that this trend will continue into the future.

I believe that for both participants and I, being involved in this study was a transformative experience that helped me understand Portuguese Canadian mothers and enabled them to discuss their issues and concerns. They were able to recognize ways in which their perspectives contribute to the knowledge base regarding the importance placed on the early education.

### **Recommendations**

Past research discussed within this thesis often made recommendations based on their findings. While every researcher foresaw the desire to take her/his own research to another level, my approach was to narrow this scope to three recommendations that have not been discussed before.

First, the dynamic values (Figure 17), that is, care, concern, and connection coalesced with the demands, that is, preservation, growth, and adaptability/acceptability of parenting a child have been absent from the conventional provincial curriculum. These are critical in building appropriate and culturally sensitive curricula and can be a way to address the reoccurring underachievement amongst Portuguese Canadian students. In addition, an area of urgent need in schooling is that of acknowledging emotions. Lack

of emotion and sterile environments inhibit learning. How can we construct pedagogy in which emotions/feelings play a major role? Emotion should be embedded in the current curriculum and other activities in the Canadian school system. This research demonstrates that emotion taught as an instruction activity is fundamental for children's cognitive development.

Second, grounded theory was a useful research tool used to delve deeply into topics that had a wide scope, many of which were sensitive and complicated. I would recommend the use of this design by future researchers as it can serve as an outlet to express participants' personal experiences that provide a sense of empowerment. As per this study, this tool enabled the participants to have a "voice" and discuss their motivation behind their choices.

Third, maternal thinking theory according to Ruddick (2007) is a form of knowing and a reservoir of nurturing experiences shared by parents in both their maternal and paternal roles. My research found that both mothers and fathers are committed to childrearing and family obligations. As these fathers do "mother" their children and are active caregivers, they have been changing the institution of motherhood and have effectively resulted in "the assimilation of men into child care." I propose that as the field of early care and education is undergoing a paradigm shift and is challenging well established notions of child care, Ruddick's maternal thinking theory be further investigated as "parental thinking theory."

### **Conclusions**

This study showed the importance of the qualitative research approach and grounded theory design when dealing with Portuguese Canadian mothers' preferences

and choices about child care. In comparison to the reviewed literature, one of the prevailed characteristics of this study was that there was an opportunity to obtain more detail about the different dimensions of the community and the ability to come up with some innovative perspectives. The use of ground theory enabled me to understand the process, how everything emerged and was instrumental in the formulation of my own grounded theory. It was hoped that the grounded theory generated in this study dissipated many of the ambiguities found in the reviewed literature. It also set a strong foundation to encourage other researchers to use this methodology to explore early education and care from the parents' perspectives.

Although the participants noted how their cultural contexts affected their educational trajectories, their mindsets were far removed from those of their immigrant parents. The reality of these Portuguese Canadian mothers was that they were no longer isolated, were very knowledgeable of educational opportunities, and have integrated themselves into mainstream society. Thus, it is likely that their children will not face the same difficulties that the first and second generations of Portuguese Canadians experienced.

In the reviewed literature, identity and culture are two blocks of one's ethnicity. Portuguese Canadian mothers in this study obtained their cultural knowledge from their parents/family, and that was transposed into their blended identity. Their personal views, though framed by their social contexts, were sufficiently malleable to adapt to changing conditions. As a consequence, these mothers having lasting values and viewpoints as to the issues pertaining to caregiving arrangements. They attached a cultural relevance to their group identity, by emphasizing the family bond, the acquisition of Portuguese

language, as well as their admiration and respect for their homeland. They are proud of their cultural and ethnic background, and they have made an effort to transmit to their children their learned values, cultural heritage, and traditions: a pillar structure for the preservation of their community's entity.

As a result, within this celebration of their heritage, the intergenerational linkages have led to a greater understanding and respect amid the present generation, and, this will impact the Portuguese Canadian generations to come.

The existing literature has undoubtedly ignored the educational as well as the socio-cultural range within the immigrant Portuguese community, thus portraying it as a static entity. Many inferences about this community have been scantily decoded through a one-size-fits-all culture conflict. The monolithic view of Portuguese Canadians does not depict their socio-cultural and educational diversity and uniqueness. As a result, it may be unreasonable to generalize about the lives of Portuguese Canadians, and presuppose that they differ "considerably" from one another. Consequently, and as shown in my study - contrary to major results in previous research, and as aforementioned and discussed -- the Portuguese community responds to the movements of any other cultural community in the process of constant change and evolution. This is an ongoing process that requires different modes of analysing the Portuguese immigrant experiences without overlooking their tendency to explore other cultural dimensions, and, most importantly, by recognizing the intercultural competence of the first, second and third generations and their sensitivity to the educational pluralities of ways of life.

It is apparent that the field of early education and care is undergoing a paradigm change and is challenging well-established notions of child development. As seen in this

research, these perspectives can be enhanced or challenged, and other practices, ideologies and theories may surface. My model of themes that emerged from this study and the coding paradigm of Portuguese Canadian mothers' preferences and choices about Early Care and Education were prime examples of how different perspectives can be interchanged.

To conclude, my approach to the development of children's social understanding focuses on the relations between people. The child becomes an emotional, social, and bioecological being and a builder of his own knowledge. This means that the child is a socially competent being. In short, my findings are best explained through Bowlby (1999) and Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991), Piaget (1975), Vygotsky (1978), and Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 2004), and Ruddick's (2007) maternal thinking theory that was the overriding theory that encapsulated the mothers' preferences and choices about care and early education. This theoretical framework is the impetus to a successful future for Portuguese community. In addition, this thesis is also a chance to share my hopeful vision of success for my community. Figure 18 is the representational metaphor for my visual coding paradigm presented in this study. Following is a description of its meaning, its relation to the child, and the significance for the Portuguese Canadian community.

Portuguese culture and traditions were brought to Canada by the emigrants of Portugal. Symbolic comparisons are drawn between the **Caldo Verde (Green Soup;** see recipe in Appendix D) and the Portuguese Canadian child. This nourishing soup is deeply rooted in heritage, culture, and tradition and is consumed in Portuguese Canadian households and restaurants to one's delight.



(Illustrated by an 8 year old boy in Grade 3 whose mother is Portuguese Canadian, used with permission.)

**Figure 18. Caldo verde metaphor.**



**Caldo Verde** is the metaphoric representation of the impact of early care and education in the child's life. All the ingredients in this soup except for two (collards and sausage [chouriço]) were blended together to form this soup that was cooked historically in a cauldron over fire. The olive oil was used to flavour the soup and represents the emotion needed to bring all the ingredients together. The ingredients represent the five themes. While all are equally important, the two most visible ingredients (collards and chourico) represent mother's expectations and success. These themes in particular stand out because the former is the driving forces behind the child's learning process and subsequently her/his success. The fire underneath represents the energy, vision, desire of the mother. The wooden spoon is used by the mother to stir the ingredients together and represents the interplay that the themes have with one another. The cauldron that contains all the ingredients represents "parental thinking theory."

The soup is the end product that represents the child's life. It is consumed, providing nourishment and growth. With time the **Caldo Verde** continues to evolve and modify with the incorporation of different ingredients. The cycle starts over again with a new version of a cauldron, ingredients, and fire representing future generations of Portuguese Canadian children. The Portuguese Canadian generations are slowly beginning to tread water into professional areas that were not common to our community. As the **Caldo Verde** is becoming more popular in the Canadian culinary arts, so are the future Portuguese Canadian generations that will have the same confidence and capability of succeeding.

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## Appendix A

### Questions of the First Interview

Study Title: Early Education: The Foundation Portuguese-Canadian Mothers' Preferences and Choices

Researcher: Laudalina Rodrigues, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mary Louise Vanderlee, Faculty of Education, Brock University

**The following questions will help me understand your perspectives and points of view regarding your beliefs and choices about children's early care and education. Your answers will provide me with insight into your values, feelings, experience and background as mothers.**

1. What Type of Care do you currently use?
2. What type of care would you use if you could have any type of care made available to you?
  - a. Day-Care
  - b. Home-Care: Parental or Relative
  - c. Babysitter
3. If a Babysitter was a more economical option to care for your child, would you consider this as an alternative? Why?
4. Based on your choice of the Types of Care, what would you do to enrich your child's educational and social skills?
5. Explain how the Type of Care you chose is important for your child's development.
6. How old do you think a child should be to participate in a structured educational environment? Why?
7. What is your feeling about the early care of your child insofar as how it prepares your child for kindergarten?
8. How do you think your decision will impact on your child's educational achievement in the future?

9. Please provide examples of daily activities that your child participates in during their spare time.
10. Would you describe yourself as:
- a. Portuguese
  - b. Canadian
  - c. Portuguese-Canadian
- Why?
11. Have you graduated from:
- a. Elementary
  - b. Secondary
  - c. Postsecondary
12. Are you currently:
- a. Stay-Home Mom
  - b. Part-time Employee
  - c. Full-time Employee
  - d. Self-Employed
  - e. Unemployed

## Appendix B

### Questions of the Second Interview

Study Title: Early Education: The Foundation Portuguese-Canadian Mothers' Preferences and Choices

Researcher: Laudalina Rodrigues, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mary Louise Vanderlee, Faculty of Education, Brock University

**The following questions will give me an opportunity to address some themes that emerged from your first interview.**

1. Assuming your child is to enrol at a Day-Care. Which of the two **Scenarios** would you prefer?      **Scenario A – Day-Care**      **Scenario B – Day-Care**

Scenario A – Day-Care	Scenario B – Day-Care
Enhanced Program	Regular Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group size; ratio of children to caregivers (5)</li> <li>• Planned indoor and outdoor activities that encourage sensory, language and cognitive development</li> <li>• Extra-curricular activity of one hour of musical stimulation; dramatic play; planned language and listening activities</li> <li>• Training, experience and stability of caregivers</li> <li>• One field-trip a week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group size; ratio of children to caregivers (8)</li> <li>• Planned indoor and outdoor activities that encourage sensory, language and cognitive development</li> <li>• Regular curricular activity that includes a balance between structure and flexibility</li> </ul>
Cost: \$100.00 per month	Cost: \$0.00 per month

2. What was most important in your decision to select Scenario A or Scenario B. Why?

Please rank 1-3 (1=most, 3=least):

\_\_\_\_ Child Ratio    \_\_\_\_ Curricular Activities    \_\_\_\_ Extra Cost

3. Are your expectations of your child/children's care and education similar to your parents or different? Why or why not? Please explain.
4. Is your definition of an "education" the same as your parents? Why or why not? Please expand.
5. What expectations do you have for your child/children in the future?
- a. my child/children's decision
  - b. gainful employment
  - c. secondary school completion (high school)
  - d. postsecondary completion (college/university)
6. How do you perceive your partner/spouse's expectation with respect to your child/children's education?
- a. our child/children's decision
  - b. gainful employment
  - c. secondary school completion (high school)
  - d. postsecondary completion (college/university)
7. Is your partner/spouse involved actively in the upbringing of your child/children? Please explain.
8. How do you measure a child/children's success?
- a. occupational achievement
  - b. gainful employment
  - c. material wealth (car, house, investments etc.)
  - d. academic achievement
  - e. other \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix D**

### **Caldo Verde**

#### **Serves 4**

500 g. potatoes

2 l. of water

1 small 'chouriço'

200 g shredded collards

2 garlic cloves

1 onion

4 tbsp. olive oil

Salt

Pepper

Peel the potatoes and heat in water with the 'chouriço' onion and garlic.

When the potatoes are well cooked remove 'chouriço' and slice.

Make a puree with the potatoes, onion, and garlic and continue to heat.

Meanwhile wash the collards repeatedly (until the water loses its green colour).

Add the collards and the sliced 'chourico' to the puree and boil.

Add half the olive oil and cook the collards.

When ready to serve, add the remaining olive oil and season to taste.

Serve the soup with slices of 'chouriço'.

**ENJOY!**

## Appendix E

## Research Ethics Board Clearance Letter



Office of Research Services  
 Research Ethics Office  
 St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1  
 T: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035/4876 F: 905-688-0748

[www.brocku.ca](http://www.brocku.ca)

DATE: 2/23/2010

FROM: Michelle McGinn, Chair  
 Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Mary Louise Vanderlee, Education

FILE: 09-105  
 Masters Thesis/Project

TITLE: Early Education: The Foundation-Portuguese Mothers' Beliefs and Decisions

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

**DECISION:** Accepted as clarified with notes

This project received ethics clearance on **February 23, 2010**. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

**Please Note:**

- Rather than asking permission for phone numbers you may want to consider asking your key community contacts to distribute your information materials for you.
- Rather than stating that the REB has "officially cleared this study", please state that the study has been reviewed and received clearance from the Brock University Ethics Board.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

MM/sp